

# Return to Vardia

A Fantasy/Quest in Three Acts

By

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# **Return to Vardia**

## Cast of Characters

Algie

Simon

Ralph

## The Spirits of the Mist (8)

Marlinus

Sophina

Varizia

Mira

## Vardian Guards (2)

Vardian Soldier 1

Vardian Soldier 2

Farian as a small child

Julia as a small child

Malika

Rabanitz

Sagazi

Goranian Soldier 1

Goranian Soldier 2

Officer

Farian as a young man

Julia as a young lady

Youths (6)

Drago

Cozma

Mercia

Harpia

Aquila

Bird Guards (8)

Bird Guard 1

Bird Guard 2

Mountain People (8)

Mountain Person 1

Mountain Person 2

Mountain Person 3

Leshi

Toma

Freya

Goranian Soldier 3

Goranian Soldier 4

Viktor

Galeo

Prison Guard

Vardian Citizens (4 males and 4 Females)

**PRODUCTION NOTES:**

The scenes in this play may be staged simply or elaborately. The use of lighting is important, particularly in the mountain and forest scenes in order to suggest mood and the environment. In the first production polystyrene was used to create rocks, damaged wall sections were and the rubble in Act One Scene 1 and Act 3 Scene 3. Complete polystyrene pillars, approximately 4 metres in height, were positioned in all scenes, but were moved Far L and R in the Eastern Pass and forest scenes to allow

more access and space for the BIRDS and MOUNTAIN PEOPLE. Standing decorated hinged flats were used to suggest locations, but this is a matter of choice.

## **Costuming**

Costuming can be simple or elaborate. The Bird Guards and the Mountain People's costumes should be creative and perhaps spectacular.

## **Description of Characters and Suggested Costuming**

**Algie, Simon and Ralph** – Three recently qualified archaeologists in the early twenties. Algie is a slim, tall, fair haired and a little naïve. Simon is dark, stocky and is inclined to be pessimistic in outlook. Ralph is fair haired, average height and the leader who tries hard to be a perfectionist, but does not always succeed. All three young men are dressed in hiking gear and references to this are outlined in the script as each is introduced.

**Spirits of the Mist** – Female dancers, who wear smoky blue or turquoise flowing chiffon garments, including wide hanging sleeves. They also wear soft dancing shoes.

**Marlinus** – Is an ageless, adviser to Queen Sophina of Vardia. His hair and beard are white and long. He wears a shimmering silver and blue ankle length robe and blue soft shoes. He also has a strong, stentorian voice.

**Sophina** – The Queen of Vardia. In Act 2 Scene 1 she is in her mid thirties. In Act 3 Scene 2 she is in her late forties. She wears an ankle length white kirtle (an undergarment) over which is a gold belted crimson calf length robe, edged with gold and having wide sleeves which come down just below the elbow. The bodice is full, its fabric draped over one shoulder and attached with a gold brooch just above a breast. Her hair is long and falls down her back to below her shoulders. Right and left of the hairline are gems clipped into the hair. She wears soft shoes.

**Varizia** – in his early twenties; a captain in the Vardian army who wears a belted knee length crimson tunic trimmed at the neck, and sleeves with cuffs. The cuffs and the bottom of the tunic are edged with gold. A black cloak hangs over his back which is clasped at the throat with a gold brooch. Underneath the tunic he wears black gartered trousers, and also wears soft black sandals with gold clasps. A sword is sheathed in his belt.

**Mira** – Sophina's dark haired handmaiden, in her late teens, wears a simple belted calf length royal blue robe, trimmed at the neck and sleeves with cuffs at the wrists. She also wears a navy blue cloak which is attached by a white clasp to one side, just above a breast. She wears blue soft sandals or shoes.

**Vardian Guards and Soldiers** - dressed simply in black belted crimson tunics which reach the knees, under which are worn black gartered leggings and soft black sandals or shoes. They also wear black cloaks fastened at their necks with crimson clasps. Swords are sheathed in their belts.

**Farian** (as a child) – a seven year old boy with dark hair who is, clothes wise, a young version of Varizia without a sword.

**Julia** (as a child) - Farian's sister, a five year old girl with blonde hair, who wears a simple purple belted calf length lemon robe and a purple cloak fastened at the throat with a gold brooch. She also wears soft lemon sandals or soft shoes with gold clasps.

**Malika** – a young nursemaid in her late teens wears a simple belted turquoise belted calf length robe, trimmed at the neck and sleeves with cuffs at the wrists. She also wears a royal blue cloak, which is attached by a white clasp to one side, just above a breast. She wears soft blue shoes.

**Rabbanitz** - In Act 2 he is in his late twenties; a Goranian mine superintendent and general in the Goranian army who wears a silver belted, knee length black tunic trimmed at the neck, and elbow length sleeves. The cuffs and the bottom of the tunic are edged in silver. A black cloak hangs over his back which is also edged with silver and clasped at the throat with a silver brooch. A silver sash is attached to the belt and travels over a shoulder underneath the cloak. He also wears black, silver gartered trousers and soft black sandals with silver buckles. A sword is sheathed in his belt.

In Act 3 he is in his early forties and his dark hair is streaked with grey.

**Sagazi** - In Act 2 he is swarthy and in his early thirties; a nobleman and leader of the Goranians who wears a silver belted, knee length black tunic trimmed at the neck, and sleeves with wide cuffs at the wrists, edged with two white silver bands. The bottom of the tunic is edged with two bands of silver. A black cloak hangs over his back which is also edged in two bands of silver and clasped at the throat with a large silver brooch. A silver sash is attached to the belt and travels over a shoulder underneath the cloak. He also wears black, silver gartered trousers and soft black sandals with silver buckles. A sword is sheathed in his belt.

In Act 3 he is in his mid forties and sports a short greying beard.

**Goranian Soldiers and Guards** - dressed simply in white belted knee length black tunics with cuffs at the elbows under which are worn white gartered black leggings and soft black sandals or shoes. They also wear black cloaks fastened at their necks with white clasps. Swords are sheathed in their belts.

**Officer** - in his twenties, he is an officer in the Goranian army who wears a white belted, knee length black tunic trimmed at the neck, and sleeves with cuffs at the elbow. The cuffs and the bottom of the tunic are edged in white. A black cloak hangs over his back which is also edged in white and clasped at the throat with a white brooch. A white sash is attached to the belt and travels over a shoulder underneath the cloak. He also wears black, white gartered trousers and soft black sandals with white clasps. A sword is sheathed in his belt.

**Farian as a young man** – He is in his late teens, dark haired, slim and heir to the throne of Vardia. He wears a gold belted knee length royal blue tunic with wide elbow length sleeves edged in gold. A navy blue cloak edged in gold hangs over his back and clasped with a gold brooch at one side, just below his neck. He has gold gartered dark blue leggings and soft dark blue shoes. He carries a sheathed sword in his belt.

In Act 3 Scene 2 his similar style tunic is gold and the rest of his costume is the same as above.

In Act 3 Scene 3 He is dressed in gold, including a cloak and leggings which are not gartered and sports a gold high fronted crown.

**Julia as a young woman** – She is seventeen years of age– She wears a cream coloured ankle length kirtle (an undergarment) over which she wears a knee length silver belted cerise robe, edged with silver and wide elbow length sleeves. The bodice is full, its fabric draped over one shoulder and attached with a silver brooch just above a breast. Her hair is long and falls down her back to below her shoulders. Right and left of the hairline are gems clipped into the hair. She wears soft shoes.

In Act 3 Scene 2 she wears a similar costume, but the robe is deep purple and edged in silver.

**Drago** – He is in his late teens, fair haired and well built. He wears a dark blue belted knee length terracotta tunic with wide elbow length sleeves trimmed with a dark blue zig zagged design, dark blue gartered leggings and soft terracotta shoes. A dark blue cloak hangs over his back and clasped with a silver brooch at his neck. He carries a sheathed roman style sword in his belt.

**Youths** – They wear a mixture of brown, yellow, blue and green knee length tunics, belted with wide sashes of complimentary colours, gartered leggings, dark cloaks clasped at the neck and soft shoes. They each carry sheathed swords.

**Cozma** – He is a nobleman, who owns a villa on the Island of Agnea. He is in his forties and has greying shoulder length hair. He wears a chocolate brown robe, which flares slightly just below the knees to reveal a cream coloured undergarment which reaches his ankles. A cream coloured cloak hangs over his back which is clasped at his neck by a gold brooch. He also dons a gold medallion on a heavy necklace and wears brown sandals or soft shoes. He walks with the aid of a staff.

In Act 3 his hair has silvered with age. His robe is russet coloured.

**Mercia** – a young portly messenger and citizen of Vardia. He wears a brown knee length tunic, brown gartered dark green leggings and soft shoes. A dark green cloak hangs down his back which is clasped at his neck.

**Harpia** – the champion of the Bird Guards and preferably played by a female. She wears a stylish black and silver bird mask, and a tight black body suit from which ornate silver and black feathers hang, especially over the arms. Her long finger nails are painted black. She also wears flat soft shoes.

**Aquila** – Leader of the Bird Guards and preferably played by a tall female. She wears a shimmering silver, blue and green robe, and an ornate eagle shaped silver bird mask. A light blue feathered cloak hangs down her back. She also wears soft blue shoes.

**Bird Guards** – They wear a mixture of brown, green and black body suits, Multi- coloured feathered cloaks and evil faced bird masks. They also wear Soft flat shoes. Many carry spears or short swords.

**The Mountain People and Persons** – they wear green Hessian or sack cloth belted knee length tunics and green leggings. Their hair is long and spiked and their faces are decorated with purple and green woad-like stripes. They carry either long staffs, short swords or cudgels.

**Leshi** – Tall, leader of the Mountain People who has bushy, long green hair. His face is striped with green and purple woad-like stripes. He wears an ankle length green Hessian robe and a black cloak clasped at the neck by a bronze brooch.

**Toma** – a short, stocky Mountain Person, in his late teens, who wears a similar

costume and make up as the Mountain People.

**Freya** – Leshi's son who is tall, in his late teens, who has bushy, long green hair and costume similar to the Mountain People, except that he has a brown cloak clasped at the neck by a bronze brooch.

**Viktor** – A Goranian officer who wears a similar costume to that worn by the Officer.

**Galeo** – A Goranian Officer who wears a similar costume to that worn by the Officer.

**Prison Guard** – He wears a brown shirt, an oily black leather waistcoat, black tight leggings and short scruffy leather boots

**Vardian Citizens** – Four Males - a variety of brown and green belted knee length tunics and gartered leggings and soft shoes.

Four Females – cream or white ankle length kirtles, calf length belted robes in a choice of colours, and soft shoes.

### **Suggested Doubling for Casting**

**Youths (6)/Bird Guards (6)**

**Varizia/ Freya**

**Officer/Toma**

### **Casting – Gender**

**Male** – Algie, Simon, Ralph, Marlinus, Varizia, Vardian Guards, Vardian Soldiers 1 and 2, Farian (as a child), Rabanitz, Sagazi, Goranian Soldier 1, 2 and 3, Officer, Farian (as a young man), Drago, Cozma, Mercia, Leshi, Toma, Freya and Vardian Citizens (4).

**Female** – Spirits of the Mist (8), Sophina, Mira, Malika, Julia (as a child), Aquila, Harpia and Vardian Citizens (4).

**Male or Female** – Youths (6), Bird Guards (6), Bird Guards 1 and 2 and Mountain People (8)

# Return to Vardia

## Act One

### Scene 1: The Ruins of Vardia

*A high, wide rocky ledge on a mountain in the Transylvanian Alps. A mist pervades the area. Through the mist can be seen a pile of rubble DR, the remains of a rocky wall, and D of those remains a section of wall, approximately 2 metres in height, which is reciprocated by another section DL. RC is a large flat rock approximately 2 metres in height. Far R and L are pillars, approximately 4 metres in height, which remain on set throughout the play. On the back wall are draped white muslin curtains which also remain on set throughout the play. In this scene blue lighting could be used to create mood and to add colour to the curtains..*

*There are exits at R, UR, UL and through the Centre aisle.*

*Dreamlike, dancing girls, The Spirits of the Mist, enter in pairs through the Centre aisle, R, UR and UL. They glide through the mist. As the dance ends they exit from where they entered.*

*The mist clears a little.*

*ALGIE stumbles up the centre aisle clearly exhausted. He is dressed in warm hiking clothes and carries a large backpack with small spade attached. He takes in his surroundings, breathing heavily*

ALGIE: I must be seeing things, but I'm sure I saw them, large bird-like creatures. Was the mist playing tricks on my mind? No, they were definitely realistic.

SIMON: *(off C aisle)* Algie! Where are you?

ALGIE: Over here Si! Watch your step on the loose rock!

*SIMON cries in pain.*

ALGIE: He's found it. *(calling)* You OK Si?

*SIMON enters through Centre aisle rubbing his leg. He is clad in similar clothing.*

SIMON: What do you think you're playing at, running off like that?

ALGIE: I saw movements up here.

SIMON: It was the mist. It can create mirage-like images you know.

ALGIE: I don't think we're alone up here, Si. This is Transylvania.

SIMON: *(sinisterly)* The land of Vlad the Impaler d'you mean, or Dracula?

ALGIE: (*concerned*) There's no need to be so ghoulish.

*Simon chuckles*

SIMON: It was probably those wild herbs you had at lunchtime.

ALGIE: They were sort of dancing, moving gracefully.

SIMON: It was definitely the herbs.

RALPH (*off C aisle*): Simon! Algie!

*SIMON and ALGIE are visibly startled.*

*ALGIE sighs with relief*

ALGIE: It's only Ralph (*calling*) Over here! Mind how you go!

*RALPH cries in pain.*

SIMON: Too late.

*RALPH enters nursing his leg. He is also dressed in hikers' garb.*

RALPH: Algie! I told you to wait for us!

*ALGIE shrugs off the comment.*

SIMON: Ralph, where are we?

RALPH: What? Oh, I'll have a look

*He pulls out a map from his pocket and a torch from his back pack. He studies map.*

SIMON: (*impatiently*) The number of times you've looked at that map today.

ALGIE: Are we lost?

RALPH: We left the plateau and then crossed the river about an hour ago. We should be .....

SIMON: (*interjecting*) We're lost aren't we?

RALPH: Well, I think we should've veered west and (*sighs*) you might be right, but I'm sure it's only temporary. We'll soon find our way out of here.

SIMON: That's great! Here I am, stuck on a Transylvanian mountainside with a leader who can't read a map and a crazy guy who hallucinates.

Ralph: OK Simon, There's no need to panic.

SIMON: I'm not!

ALGIE: And I wasn't hallucinating Si.

RALPH: Let's stay calm and consider the practicalities.

SIMON: Where do we go from here then?

RALPH: We camp here for the night and hopefully by morning the mist will clear and we'll be able to see the river and the plateau.

SIMON: And if the mist doesn't clear?

RALPH: Simon, you're beginning to irritate me with your pessimism.

ALGIE: There doesn't seem to be any shelter around here.

RALPH: Then we'll have to huddle up against the wall and do the best we can.

SIMON: (*sarcastically*) Oh, that'll be fun.

RALPH: May I remind you that it was you who dropped the camping gear in the river.

SIMON: And may I remind you that I was the mug who carried it for most of the way.

*RALPH takes in the surroundings.*

RALPH: Oh come on, let's not argue.

ALGIE: Look at those pillars over there?

*RALPH and SIMON inspect.*

RALPH: They've certainly passed the test of time.

SIMON: I reckon this is the site of some kind of temple or palace.

RALPH: Interesting, don't you think?

SIMON: Not at the moment, no. I'd like to know exactly where we are.

ALGIE: I'd like to know what those figures were.

SIMON: Don't go on about that again. (*to RALPH*) Algie thinks he saw ghosts.

ALGIE: They weren't ghosts, they were real.

RALPH: It was probably the mist playing tricks.

SIMON: That's what I said.

ALGIE: (*exasperated*) They weren't ghosts I tell you!

RALPH: We need to get some shut eye and have a good look at this site tomorrow, as soon as the mist clears.

*He inspects the R wall section*

SIMON: What if it rains in the night?

RALPH: Then we'll get wet won't we? There's a good overhang above this wall, it shouldn't be too bad. We'll need to clear some of that rubble to get closer to it. Come on let's start working.

ALGIE: We'll certainly sleep well tonight.

*They remove and rubble and clear ground DR. ALGIE examines a piece of rubble with interest.*

ALGIE: Hey look. This is really interesting. *(he produces a chalice)*

*RALPH and SIMON join him. RALPH shines the torch.*

RALPH: What a find!

SIMON: What is it?

ALGIE: It's some kind of gold cup.

RALPH: It's a chalice and it seems to be encrusted with stones, gemstones perhaps.

ALGIE: Roman, d'yer think?

RALPH: I'm not sure. There's some kind of inscription. What do you make of it Simon?

SIMON *(taking chalice)*: I can make out a V. Wait a minute, there's more. V A R D I A. Vardia?

RALPH: I've no idea what that means.

ALGIE: Vardia's probably a holiday resort and this is could be one of its cheap touristy gifts.

RALPH: What, up here Algie? It's far too remote.

SIMON: *(examining chalice)* Hang on, there's more. Elisceum.

ALGIE: *(dramatically throwing out his arms and calling)* Elisceum Vardia!

*His mocking call triggers off a flash of lightning and a thunderclap. Shafts of light illuminate the ruins. The whole stage is lit eerily. MARLINUS appears on the large flat rock RC. He wears a long white, silver and blue robe which shimmers in the eerie light. The three men fall back in amazement.*

MARLINUS: Who are you? You're not from these parts? Do you profess to be the guardians of the chalice?

Simon: What the..!

RALPH: Sorry, we don't understand. What do you mean?

MARLINUS: Your companion holds the chalice that has been lost, buried for over 2000 years.

ALGIE: I - I found it in some rubble, over there.

RALPH: Who are you sir?

MARLINUS: I am Marlinus, adviser to the people of Vardia. I am the keeper of the chalice which has come into your possession.

SIMON: The people of Vardia? Do they exist?

MARLINUS: Indeed they do, at least in spirit. What is your business here?

RALPH: We are archaeologists.

MARLINUS: Ah, the study of all that is ancient and buried.

RALPH: One can learn a great deal from the remains of the past.

MARLINUS: And yet humankind continues to suffer and regularly wages war. Not much learning in that respect, don't you agree?

RALPH: We are archaeologists' sir not anthropologists.

ALGIE: This is our first unsupervised expedition since we qualified (*quick glances at SIMON and RALPH*) as I'm sure you'll soon find out.

*RALPH and SIMON glare at him*

SIMON: We are searching for Roman remains in these mountains. Many sites were discovered in the past, but we hope to find more.

MARLINUS: Oh yes, the Romans.

ALGIE: The whole region was once known as Dacia, a Roman province.

MARLINUS: Really? Does it now have a different name?

RALPH: Yes, Transylvania. We are in the Transylvanian Alps.

SIMON: (*glancing at Ralph*) And we are lost.

MARLINUS: You are wasting your time searching for Roman remains in this vicinity.

*The three men look about them*

MARLINUS: Do these ruins appear Roman to you?

RALPH: We can't say without carrying out a proper investigation.

MARLINUS: I can assure you, the walls of Vardia are not Roman.

RALPH: We know nothing of Vardia, nothing at all.

MARLINUS: Vardia was an independent kingdom, small by Roman standards, but wealthy and sometimes strong.

SIMON: Was it ever invaded?

MARLINUS: Oh yes and occupied by its main enemy on one occasion. However, I must request the return of the chalice so that we may all move on.

ALGIE: Please, we would like to know more.

RALPH: Algie, we are tired and hungry. We must rest.

MARLINUS: You shall rest and eat, but first the chalice.

*He claps his hands. There is a clap of thunder. Dancers enter from Centre aisle, R and L and glide around the ruins. The men are mesmerised by the spectacle.*

ALGIE: It's them. The figures I saw in the mist! Amazing! (scoffing at RALPH and SIMON) Hallucinating!

MARLINUS: My spirits of the mist and I have searched far and relentlessly for the chalice, yet it was here beneath our feet all the time. It would seem that your visit was meant be.

*One of the lead dancers approaches SIMON and takes the chalice from him, who relinquishes it without any objection. The chalice is passed from dancer to dancer in an elaborate dance and it is then offered to MARLINUS.*

MARLINUS: (*admiring the chalice*) It has come home at last. Spirits of the mist, your quest is over. You have searched long and hard and you now deserve to rest.

*The dancers bow before MARLINUS and glide about the three men before exiting in pairs R, L and through the Centre aisle.*

ALGIE: Absolutely amazing!

MARLINUS: (*He studies the chalice*) It is as if I am being re-united with a lost friend.

ALGIE: Er, you were going to tell us more about Vardia.

RALPH: Algie, I really don't think...

SIMON: (*interjecting*) Hold on Ralph, this could be most interesting.

RALPH: (*sighing*) If you insist. (*respectfully*) Please sir, continue.

*MARLINUS joins the others at C*

MARLINUS: Vardia had a great leader. I shall tell you about him.

*There is a rumble of thunder.*

The weather is changing for the worst. I shall take you to a safe place where you must eat and I shall continue the story.

RALPH: You're very kind.

MARLINUS: Come, we must go.

*They exit through the Centre aisle except ALGIE who surveys the scene*

ALGIE: Wow! We've stumbled upon something truly wonderful.

SIMON: (*off*) Algie! Come on!

ALGIE: (*aping MARLINUS and raising his arms*) Spirits of the Mist!

*A very loud thunderclap is heard*

ALGIE: I'm on my way!

*He exits in a hurry through the Centre aisle.*

*Lights down*

## **Scene 2: Royal Palace of Vardia - day**

*The rubble, and wall sections, large rock and damaged pillars have been struck. Full size pillars have been installed far R and far L. The muslin curtains have changed to red by appropriate lighting. No furniture. There are exits UR, R, UL and through the Centre aisle.*

*The noise of battle can be heard in the distance.*

*Lights up on SOPHINA, MIRA and MARLINUS at C. URC and ULC are VARDIAN GUARDS (2)*

SOPHINA: We're losing the battle Marlinus. We desperately need your guidance.

MARLINUS: It's far too late my lady. As you know your husband banished me from Vardia. He doesn't believe in the power I possess. My lady, I am answerable to him, I must therefore await his calling.

SOPHINA: My husband was in awe of you and feared your powers. He is out there in the thick of battle and completely unable to call upon you. I've always admired believed in your powers and I seek your help and advice.

MARLINUS: How can I help you? Your guards were brave in risking their lives in escorting me here, but alas I cannot turn the tide of battle.

*VARIZIA enters from Centre aisle. He is dishevelled and wounded.*

VARIZIA: My Lady!

*He bows, but when he sees MARLINUS he draws his sword.*

Guards! Seize the wizard!

*The guards move downstage and draw their swords.*

SOPHINA: Stop! How dare you give orders without my consent. Guards, stand aside.

*They do so.*

VARIZIA: But my Lady the King disclaims the wizard; he's a threat to Vardia.

SOPHINA: He's no threat! Captain Varizia, the King is not here! You answer to me and I will not have you calling Marlinus a wizard in that derogatory manner, he is my adviser.

VARIZIA: Forgive me my Lady; it's about the King that I'm here. The news is not good. His majesty is personally engaged in battle and the odds are not in his favour.

*SOPHINA turns away. MIRA offers support.*

MIRA: My lady, I'm sure the tide of battle will change in our favour.

VARIZIA: It will be impossible; the Goranian army has closed in on all sides. We are trapped.

SOPHINA: That's why I've sought Marlinus's advice.

*She hands him a red linen scarf*

Captain Varizia you will not breathe a word about this to anyone, do you understand?

VARIZIA: My lady?

SOPHINA: (rebuking him) Listen!

Varizia: Yes my lady.

SOPHINA: If it is possible, give this to my husband and tell him that my heart is with and that Vardia and I love him dearly.

VARIZIA: I shall endeavour to do so, my lady.

SOPHINA: You are a brave captain. Fight well for Vardia.

Varizia: Oh, I shall my lady.

*VARIZIA bows and exits Centre aisle*

SOPHINA: Marlinus, for the sake of my children and the future of Vardia, what am I to do?

*MARLINUS ponders the situation briefly.*

MARLINUS: You have no choice but to leave Vardia with your children.

SOPHINA: Leave?

MARLINUS: Should the Goranians seize Vardia your children will be slaughtered. If you leave I assure you that in the future your son Farian will return to Vardia and reclaim the kingdom. He shall become a great leader.

MIRA: How can you suddenly say such things? It's a false prophecy!

SOPHINA: Mira! Marlinus, please explain.

MARLINUS: You must have complete trust in the power I possess, whether it be by

prophecy or otherwise.

MIRA: Where can my Lady go? There's only one road (*pointing to Centre aisle*) there, through the fighting.

SOPHINA: Please listen, Mira.

MARLINUS: You have no alternative but to leave by the Eastern pass.

*MIRA moves away in disbelief.*

SOPHINA: The pass is treacherous!

MIRA: There are stories of savage attacks in the pass. It's too dangerous!

MARLINUS: It's the only means of escape from Vardia, my lady. You must believe me. If you do not do as I say you will deeply regret it.

SOPHINA: Mira, where are the children?

MIRA: Why, with Malika my Lady.

SOPHINA: Listen! Bring them to me and ensure that Malika is with them.

MIRA: My Lady, please do not consider making this journey!

SOPHINA: Do as I bid! Go quickly.

*MIRA bows and exits UL.*

Marlinus, the children shall leave without me. Mira and Malika will go with them.

MARLINUS: But as their mother, you must go.

SOPHINA: If, as you say, my son shall return to lead Vardia then I shall accept your advice. I cannot leave Vardia, I just cannot desert my people I trust you understand.

MARLINUS: I do and I am comforted by your trust in me, but I do fear for your safety.

*SOLDIERS 1 and 2 enter Centre aisle quickly and out of breath*

SOLDIER 1: (*distraught*) Oh my Lady. The King – my lady, he's been slain!

*SOPHINA turns away. MARLINUS approaches her in an effort to comfort her.*

SOLDIER 2: He fought so bravely. He was in the thick of it my Lady, urging his men on. He died honourably, without fear.

SOLDIER 1: And now the enemy's dangerously close to the palace.

SOPHINA: What of our Officers?

SOLDIER 2: All gone, except one who is defending the armoury with a handful of men.

SOPHINA: Have you seen Captain Varizia?

*The soldiers shake their heads.*

SOLDIER 1: He fought side by side with the King to the very end. My Lady, we must return and defend the approach to the palace.

SOPHINA: No, you must stay here.

SOLDIER 2: Stay my Lady, but we are needed in battle?

SOPHINA: You will do as I say! (*calmly*) I applaud your deep sense of duty and courage, but you shall assist in saving Vardia in a manner in which you would not even consider plausible.

*The SOLDIERS look at each other bemused.*

SOLDIER 1: Are you hoping for some kind of miracle, my Lady?

SOPHINA: (*smiling*) Yes, I suppose I am in a way.

*They bow and move aside.*

*MIRA and MALIKA enter UL with FARIAN and JULIA. The children run to SOPHINA and*

*hug her.*

SOPHINA: Mira, Malika, you are to accompany the children. The soldiers shall also go with you.

SOLDIER 2: We cannot leave Vardia at a time like this, my Lady!

SOPHINA: You shall do as I say!

SOLDIER 2: Forgive me your lady.

MALIKA: Where are we going?

SOPHINA: We have no time to discuss the whys and wherefores. Get ready to leave. Mira shall explain. These two soldiers will escort you. You will return to Vardia in due course. (*to children*) and I shall be here waiting for you.

FARIAN: Yes, Mama.

JULIA: It will be soon, won't it Mama?

SOPHINA: Sooner than you may think my dearest. (*The three of them hug*)

MIRA: My Lady, I beg of you, please come with us!

MALIKA: Mira is right. The children need you.

JULIA: Oh, Mama! I shall miss you so much. I may not see you again.

*She begins to cry. FARIAN comforts her.*

FARIAN: It'll be alright. I'll look after you Julia.

MALIKA: My lady, please!

SOPHINA: (*to MALIKA*) No more pleas Malika, I don't want the children even more upset. They need to be comforted by your strength as well as your love.

MALIKA: Of course, I shall take great care of them

*MALIKA kneels in front of SOPHINA who places a hand on her shoulder comfortingly*

SOPHINA: I trust you shall my dear.

*MALIKA rises*

MARLINUS: We must move swiftly.

*He takes the chalice from inside his robe.*

A sip from the chalice shall give you strength and safety on your journey. You will reach the plains via the Eastern Pass and eventually the Black Sea. There you will find a small island off the coast called Agnea. You will be safe from the Romans and any marauding tribes. A man they call Cozma will meet you and you shall stay in his care.

SOLDIER 1: The odds on succeeding on such a journey are the same as we have had in battle, slim.

SOPHINA: You are being insubordinate! I am still your Queen.

SOLDIER 1: Forgive me your majesty, but I too fear for their lives as much as I do for yours.

SOPHINA: I understand, but I have the utmost faith in this venture and I expect you to obey. You must see to it that they remain safe.

SOLDIER 2: We shall see to it that they are my lady.

MARLINUS: Your journey will be safe – your bellies, full. Beasts will not bother you and the mountains will seem like rolling hills. You must now drink from the chalice. You shall all drink, the children first.

*MARLINUS offers the chalice to Julia.*

JULIA: (*surprised*) The cup is empty Mama!

FARIAN: If you have faith Julia, it shall be full and you will drink. Is that not so Marlinus?

MARLINUS: Yes, my prince. You speak wisely.

JULIA: (*drinking*) Why, it tastes just like honey!

*FARIAN drinks*

FARIAN: Yes, sweet and strong. We must be strong, mustn't we Mama?

SOPHINA: Indeed you must my dear.

*The chalice is handed to MIRA. She hesitates and sobs quietly.*

SOPHIA: Drink Mira!

*MIRA places the chalice to her lips*

*MALIKA and the SOLDIERS drink in turn.*

*JULIA and FARIAN hug their mother.*

JULIA: We shall see you again soon Mama.

SOPHINA: Yes my dear. You shall always be in my thoughts.

*MARLINUS raises chalice in both hands.*

MARLINUS: Elisceum Vardia!

*Thunder clap*

Go! Quickly! You will be safe.

*MALIKA takes the children's hands. MIRA hesitates, but then exits UR with the SOLDIERS.*

RABANITZ: *(off Centre aisle)* Break open the gates!

*RABANITZ enters through Centre aisle with GORANIAN SOLDIERS 1 and 2. THE VARDIAN GUARDS draw swords.*

RABANITZ: *(scoffing)* What have we here, the last line of defence? Only two Vardians at arms it seems. Take them!

*The GORANIANS engage in fighting with the VARDIANS. There is a fight and eventually the guards are slain.*

*The GORANIAN SOLDIERS with drawn swords slowly approach SOPHINA and MARLINUS threateningly.*

*SAGAZI enters through Centre aisle with an OFFICER.*

SAGAZI: Rabanitz, they shall be prisoners not corpses!

*The GORANIAN SOLDIERS retreat.*

Queen Sophina?

SOPHINA: Sagazi.

SAGAZI: I am honoured ma'am. Officer, make a search of the chambers.

OFFICER: Do I take prisoners, my lord?

SOPHINA: You will find only servants.

SAGAZI: Go. Every living being shall be taken as a slave. Slay those who challenge

you.

OFFICER: Yes my lord.

*He exits R.*

RABANITZ: *(to Marlinus)* Who might you be old man?

MARLINUS: I am the Queen's adviser.

SAGAZI: Marlinus?

MARLINUS: *(bowing)* My Lord Sagazi.

SAGAZI: The wizard? I've heard much about you from my spies. I am told you have a great deal of power, too much perhaps.

MARLINUS: I use my power for rightful purposes, my lord.

SAGAZI: I am pleased to hear it.

MARLINUS: And I have always been faithful to Vardia.

SAGAZI: Then you will always be a threat to Goran.

RABANITZ: If he has such power, why could he not have ensured success for the Vardians?

SAGAZI: Why, because he was banished by his own King. Even his ruler was wary of his so called power. Am I correct wizard?

MARLINUS: Alas, you are correct.

RABANITZ: He's probably an old fraud!

SAGAZI: Take him away Rabanitz. I shall decide his fate later.

RABANITZ: With pleasure. Come wizard.

SOPHINA: Release him, he has harmed no one.

*MARLINUS is taken through the Centre aisle and off by RABANITZ and the GORANIAN SOLDIERS*

SAGAZI: Sophina, I have fought many battles to secure this victory and I'm elated. You no longer have any rights to this city. A Queen without a King is one thing, but a Queen without her subjects amounts to nothing.

SOPHINA: I am still a Vardian, Sagazi, please grant me one wish.

SAGAZI: Which is?

SOPHINA: Release Marlinus.

SAGAZI: *(scoffing)* The wizard? I daren't do that.

SOPHINA: He's no threat; in fact he may be of use to you.

SAGAZI: He's been a friend of Vardia too long, Sophina. I've heard that he worships you, in which case he would do anything for you. To allow him any freedom could be extremely dangerous. Now tell me, will my men find your children among the living?

SOPHINA: My children are safe.

*RABANITZ enters swiftly through the Centre aisle*

RABANITZ: The wizard, he's disappeared!

SAGAZI: Disappeared? How could you let an old man escape?

RABANITZ: He drank from a chalice and suddenly cried out. He then dropped it and disappeared into thin air, it all happened so quickly. I have sent the men to retrieve the chalice.

SAGAZI: *(turning on SOPHINA)* And you say he's no threat!

*The GORANIAN SOLDIERS 1 and 2 enter through the Centre aisle*

RABANITZ: Well?

GORANIAN 1: We couldn't find it.

GORANIAN 2: It fell some fifty metres between the rocks. It was impossible to get to into the crevice.

SAGAZI: A magical chalice, perhaps. No matter, without it the wizard may be powerless.

*Enter OFFICER R with a terrified MIRA*

SOPHINA: Mira!

SAGAZI: Who is this girl?

OFFICER: She was lurking in the shadows, my lord, shaking in fear and mumbling something about her lady.

*MIRA throws herself at SOPHINA'S feet.*

MIRA: I could not leave without you my lady!

SOPHINA: You are a fool Mira. You did not drink then?

MIRA: *(slowly looking up at SOPHINA)* No my lady. I just couldn't leave you.

*She sobs*

SAGAZI: Drink? Were you considering poisoning yourself?

*MIIRA and SOPHINA look at each other and MIRA turns to SAGAZI and nods*

SAGAZI: Your lady is right, you are a fool. Take her away!

OFFICER: (*grasping her*) Shall I put her to the sword?

*MIRA moans loudly*

SOPHINA: Please treat her kindly, she is my personal handmaiden.

SAGAZI: Imprison her and let me know when she's more settled. I wish to question her.

OFFICER: (*smiling wickedly into MIRA'S face, who whimpers*) I could torture her, sir.

SAGAZI: No, that won't be necessary - yet.

OFFICER: (*disappointedly*) Oh, as you wish my Lord.

*The OFFICER exits R with MIRA forcibly*

SAGAZI: I shall also have the pleasure of talking to you later Sophina.

SOPHINA: (*smiling*) What can we discuss Sagazi, we have nothing in common.

SAGAZI: We will talk and if necessary I shall make you talk. Guards, imprison our Lady, but treat her kindly.

*GORANIAN SOLDIERS exit R with SOPHINA*

SAGAZI: (*to RABANITZ*) We must continue the search for the chalice and the Children, especially the boy, but first we must celebrate our victory. Come Rabanitz!

SAGAZI exits through the Centre aisle. RABANITZ stops him with the following reply. Come Rabanitz, we must celebrate our victory!

RABANITZ: (*calling after him*) What do you intend to do with the children?

SAGAZI: Get rid of them of course! Put them to the sword!

They laugh heartily. SAGAZI exits followed by RABANITZ

*Spot on MARLINUS C.*

MARLINUS: Farian, Julia and Malika arrived safely at the island of Agnea. Cozma treated them as if they were his own children. In the meantime, the search for the chalice became a daily task not only for the Goranians but also for myself and the Daughters of the Mist.

*Spot off MARLINUS.*

*Lights up dimly on the DAUGHTERS of the MIST as they dance briefly in an eerie blue light.*

*Lights Down slowly*

*End of Act One*

## ACT TWO

### SCENE 1: A piazza at Cozma's villa on The Island of Agnea - day

*The stage is empty, although the pillars and muslin curtains remain. If desired a set of decorated flats could be positioned to suggest the location URC and ULC. In any event lighting colours the curtains a pale yellow.*

*Lights up on a group of 6 YOUTHS engaged in a stylised sword fight. One of them is FARIAN, now in his teens and another is DRAGO. MALIKA, JULIA, COZMA and 2 YOUTHS make up an audience. The fighting ends with a number of fighters kneeling and yielding to their partners. FARIAN stands over the yielding, DRAGO. The small audience applaud. FARIAN goes to pull DRAGO from the ground, who playfully pulls FARIAN to the ground. They both stand.*

DRAGO: Never trust the yielder, Farian! One of these days you'll yield to me.

FARIAN: I shall be on my guard my friend (*to the fighting youths*). We are a worthy team. We deserve better than this motley audience.

*The fighters laugh in acknowledgement.*

COZMA: Don't cut off the hand that has taught you Farian.

JULIA: Malika and I remember when you could not lift a sword, dear brother.

DRAGO: He still has difficulty!

*FARIAN mimics an inability to hold his sword properly and drops it.*

DRAGO: Allow me.

*As DRAGO stoops to pick up the sword, FARIAN pushes DRAGO to the ground with his foot, seizes the dropped sword and stands over DRAGO.*

FARIAN: You must yield for the second time today, my friend.

*The audience and other fighters cheer. FARIAN pulls DRAGO to his feet and they embrace. There is spattering of 'Bravos' and similar expressions from the YOUTHS.*

COZMA: Now it is time to eat. The tables are laid. Malika, Julia make sure that our friends are well fed.

MALIKA: Julia, he forgets you are a princess.

COZMA: You should know, Malika, there are no princesses or other royal persons on Agnea. She will become a princess on her return to Vardia.

FARIAN: In any case, she's not a princess, she's my sister.

DRAGO: (*bowing to JULIA*) Ah, but she's a fair princess. All a man could desire.

*The youths coo and cheer.*

JULIA: (*with false modesty, and dramatically*) Arrest this fool for he makes me blush!

DRAGO: (*faking sorrow*) Farian, the princess looks upon me as a fool! My face I must hide.

MALIKA: Yes and fools shall be paraded for all to see and chide!

*The youths acknowledge MALIKA with cheers and grab DRAGO and lift him to more Cheers.*

COZMA: (*above the din*) Eat well my friends!

*They lead him away and exit through the Centre aisle. JULIA and MALIKA follow and exit.*

*FARIAN stays and is deep in thought. COZMA is about to leave through the Centre aisle but stops as he notices him.*

COZMA: You appear pre-occupied my son. What is in your thoughts?

FARIAN: Cozma, you have been a true father and have taught me many things for which I am truly indebted

COZMA: You're a fine young man; you're now ready to become a true warrior and a leader.

FARIAN: Vardia draws me, taunts me. I wonder whether it still exists, whether my mother is alive.

COZMA: Vardia is your destiny my son. Your mother is waiting, believe me, she is waiting.

FARIAN: Cozma, living here is too comfortable. It makes me uneasy. I have taken A great deal from you and have given nothing in return.

COZMA: Nonsense. You have been a gift, a son to love and to be proud of. I do understand, it is time for you to move on, but Marlinus will call you when the time is right.

FARIAN: What if something has happened to him?

COZMA: Do you really believe that? Cast aside your anxieties my son. You have so much to look forward to.

*They embrace.*

*MALIKA and JULIA enter through Centre aisle in a hurry.*

JULIA: A stranger has arrived.

MALIKA: He brings news.

COZMA: News? Who is he?

JULIA: He says he comes from Vardia!

*The actors freeze.*

*Lights down*

**Scene 2: A Terrace at Cozma's villa**

*The stage is empty except for a table and three chairs. A decorated flat UL or UR could be used to suggest the scene. The curtains and their colour remain the same as in the previous scene.*

*On the table are metal plates, goblets and cheese and bread*

*MERCIA the messenger sits at the table eating. DRAGO is seated, drinking.*

*FARIAN is perusing a written message.*

MERCIA: It's taken me nearly a year. If I'd come by the Eastern pass I wouldn't be sitting here enjoying this meal, I'd be served up as one.

COZMA: Stay as long as you wish. You must rest.

MERCIA: Thank you sir. I daren't think of my return journey and when I do get back I'll be what many Vardians are - slaves.

FARIAN: (*Handing the written message to COZMA*) According to this the chalice is lost. One drink from it was not enough!

COZMA: Without that one drink my son we wouldn't be dining here together. You now have another challenge. It's part of your destiny.

MERCIA: I know the way back, young sir.

FARIAN: Yes, but a year's journey!

MERCIA: It's safe, provided you don't mix with the Romans. (*he eats hungrily*)

FARIAN: It is too long. You say I must be patient, but....

COZMA: (*interjecting*) Then you must take the direct route, the way you came here.

FARIAN: Through the Eastern pass? It would be suicide without Marlinus's protective, er, magic, call it what you will!

COZMA: (*considering message*) In his missive, Marlinus asks me whether you have the strength, courage and the skills to make the journey. I believe you can do it, Farian.

DRAGO: I agree. Farian, we can do it, together!

FARIAN: You? No, I could not carry the responsibility for your safety.

DRAGO: If I didn't know you, I would consider your remark as an insult - sheer

arrogance!

FARIAN: Far from it Drago. If I offended you I apologise. I am truly concerned for your safety; I just want you to live.

DRAGO: I offer my help as a friend, a brother. I intend to die an old man with you at my side.

*They embrace and laugh.*

FARIAN: *(breaking off)* Yet, I fear for Julia and Malika.

COZMA: It is also their destiny. You underestimate their strength, they must go with you.

FARIAN: You're right of course; I couldn't possibly leave without them.

DRAGO: I find it amazing. I'm about to share a journey with a King.

FARIAN: *(smiling)* Yes and just you remember that my friend.

*DRAGO kneels before him*

DRAGO: Your majesty.

*(He takes FARIAN'S hand and goes to kiss it)*

FARIAN: *(taking his hand away and laughs)* I'm not yet King, my captain.

DRAGO: *(feigning surprise)* Just a Captain? Is that all I am to you?

*They laugh and FARIAN slaps DRAGO on the back*

*DRAGO Takes a goblet from the table and hands it to FARIAN.*

DRAGO: *(Raising his own goblet)* To our future King!

FARIAN: *(raising his goblet)* To Vardia!

*MERCIA joins the toasting*

MERCIA: And may we succeed in our quest!

FARIAN and DRAGO: We?

MERCIA: Of course I'm coming with you. I shall go mad if I have to take the same route back. A year! I'm a Vardian and besides, I've never rubbed shoulders with a King before. *(eating heartily)* Mind you, this food is fit for a King! *(he eats).*

FARIAN: I am glad to hear it. Move over. Come let's eat!

*Lights down.*

### **Scene 3: The Eastern Pass – early morning**

*The stage is empty. Again decorated flats and lighting could indicate the location and mood, which should be mountainous, lonely, fairly dim and tense. In any event lighting colours the curtains a misty blue.*

*FARIAN, COZMA, DRAGO, MERCIA, JULIA and MALIKA enter. The men wear cloaks and are armed with swords. The women wear hooded cloaks. COZMA and MERCIA walk with the aid of staffs.*

COZMA: Here I must leave you my son.

FARIAN: I only wish I could persuade you to join us, dear Cozma.

COZMA: We are of one heart, but of different homes, my son. Don't talk of Persuasion, one day we shall meet again.

*They embrace*

JULIA: I shall miss you dearly, Cozma. Please take care.

*MALIKA joins Julia in embracing COZMA.*

COZMA: Protect your princess, Malika.

MALIKA: She shall never leave my sight.

COZMA: Mercia, Drago, guard them well. Keep your wits about you and stay together. We have been fortunate in avoiding Roman soldiers and Gothic tribes. Your journey ahead is virtually unknown, despite the wild stories. May the stars in the heavens be with you.

*FARIAN and JULIA reach out to him. He takes their hands.*

JULIA: Thank you for your guidance. I look forward to our next meeting.

*COZMA smiles*

COZMA: Please say no more for I shall find it difficult to leave.

MALIKA: May the gods keep you safe.

*COZMA exits DR. They watch him leave and wave.*

*MERCIA has been distracted. He looks up and surveys the skies.*

MERCIA: Birds! Look at the size of them!

MALIKA: They may be vultures.

JULIA: How reassuring Malika.

DRAGO: We need not fear them surely.

MERCIA: Fear them? Far from it, I'm expecting to eat them. I'm starving.

FARIAN: You appear to live by your belly, Mercia.

MERCIA: My only sin, my lord, my only sin.

FARIAN: When I'm a ruler you may call me my lord. Not until then.

MERCIA: As you wish my lord.

*FARIAN draws his sword and jokingly threatens him*

Oh, er forgive me my... forgive me.

FARIAN: Come we must be in the mountains by sunset.

*They move to exit through the Centre aisle*

MALIKA: (*surveying the skies*) The birds seem to be getting closer. They must be looking for prey.

MERCIA: Dinner on wings they are, miss, dinner on wings.

*They exit.*

*Lights down.*