

SCENE 3, A LARGE ROOM BENEATH THE MANOEL THEATRE

[Sabrina steps into the chest and starts to bend down. As soon as she's no longer visible, Lexy rushes up the steps, slams down the lid, and locks it. Then she goes back down the steps while laughing and filming with her phone.]

SABRINA *[terrified from within the chest]* What's going on? What are you doing? Open up! Lexy!

LEXY And just like that, poor Sabrina is now locked in the old chest under the stage. *[turning the phone towards her face]* I told you I'd do it! Becky? Rowena? Louisa? What do you think of that?

[Suddenly, a booming laugh echoes throughout the room. When the sound dies down there is absolute silence. Lexy turns her phone off and flashes her torch all across the chamber.]

LEXY Who's there?

[A hoarse voice is heard although Lexy cannot tell from which direction it's coming.]

VOICE Who's down here?

LEXY Who are you?

VOICE Don't you know that you're not supposed to be here?

LEXY Where are you?

[A dim lightbulb goes on and we see the room in its entirety for the first time. It is full of old furniture, mouldy papier-mâché statues, and diverse pieces of sets from plays that were staged at the Manoel over the centuries. Among them is a large chair that looks like a throne. It has a distinctly creepy aura.]

LEXY What place is this?

[from the side, a long thin shadow is cast as a figure approaches the girls.]

VOICE Let me see you a little better. Let me see who dares come down here tonight.

[Lexy runs off in terror as the shadow gets closer and ALFRED appears wearing dirty work clothes and with paper-white skin.]

ALFRED Damn kids...

[Alfred is about to return where he came from when he notices that something isn't right. Going up onto the pedestal, he opens the chest, bends into it and pulls out Sabrina who has fainted.]

ALFRED Who's this now? Evening young lady. *[Alfred gently pats her face.]*
Are you all right?

SABRINA Who... who are you?

ALFRED I think I'm the one who should be asking that question. After all, I'm supposed to be here. You: no.

[Alfred helps Sabrina out and closes the chest so they may sit on it.]

SABRINA I'm Sabrina. I'm taking part in a play at the Manoel.

ALFRED Right, and instead of going off home when you were done, you and that other busybody felt that you had to come see what's under the theatre. Is she in the play with you?

SABRINA Aha, my friend has the lead role.

ALFRED I'm not sure, but as far as I know, friends are not in the habit of locking each other in boxes in the dark.

SABRINA And what are you doing down here?

ALFRED Me? I'm almost always here, darling. I'm the theatre's curator. My job is to look after and organise all that you see around you.

SABRINA This junk?

ALFRED *[laughing]* There are those who would call it heritage, art, and history. But when one describes the treasures to be found within these chambers, 'junk' is a word that frequently crops up as well. I'm Alfred.

SABRINA Nice to meet you.

ALFRED So tell me a bit about this play you're all doing.

SABRINA It's called 'The Legend of the Cospicorn'. Our director wrote it himself.

ALFRED Right. And what is this Cospicorn?

SABRINA It's a sort of monster that lives under the Manoel Theatre.

ALFRED Ah, now I get it. That's why recently there's been a flood of people sneaking around down here.

SABRINA I've never been here before.

ALFRED But that friend of yours has sometimes been here with other girls.

SABRINA She didn't tell me.

ALFRED I have a feeling she wanted to play a bad joke on you. And then these two men often come down. One always has a serious look on his face and the other's a big guy. Older than you girls but still very young.

SABRINA That's William iour director, and the other one sounds like Gabriel the stage manager. They're almost always together.

ALFRED Tell me more about this monster – this Cospicorn. Should I be worried?

SABRINA According to our play, the Cospicorn is like a demon that lives down here and likes to watch the shows that are staged at the Manoel.

ALFRED A creature with culture. Has anyone ever seen it?

SABRINA Yes and no. Sometimes the Cospicorn would find an actor waiting backstage, attack them, wear their costume, and go onstage instead of them. Then, after the show, the actor would be found unconscious with no idea what just happened.

ALFRED This monster must be quite the actor if the audience never notices.

SABRINA According to our play, he's outstanding.

ALFRED An interesting story. I just might be tempted to come see it. And I'll be sure to be careful when I'm at work – in case I run into this Cospicorn of yours.

SABRINA Of course it's just a story. There are no monsters down here.

ALFRED *[laughing]* Oh I only wish you were right about that.

SABRINA What do you mean?

ALFRED I pretty much live down here. And although throughout all the years I've spent sifting through the rooms under the theatre, and walking along the passages beneath Valletta, I can't say I've ever seen anything strange – I'd be lying if I said I've never *felt* anything... A presence in the shadows that's observing me with a great curiosity. Almost as great a curiosity as you and your friends'.

SABRINA What... what do you think it is?

ALFRED Who knows? Whatever it is, it's never let me see it.

SABRINA And you're not scared?

ALFRED If it wanted to do me harm, it's had plenty of opportunities to do so. Down here it's easy to lose track of time, and I've often spent several days in a row here without seeing a single ray of sunlight.

SABRINA So you're saying this thing then... it isn't dangerous.

ALFRED Oh that's not what I'm saying at all. Maybe it's gotten accustomed to me – that's why it leaves me be. But I'm old and quiet and I don't bother anybody. A bunch of silly kids shouting and screaming the place down... it might not like that so much. If I were you, I'd tell your friends not to come down here anymore. Nobody can say what lurks in the dark beneath the theatre.

[Sabrina peers into the shadows apprehensively.]

SABRINA Alfred?

ALFRED Yes?

SABRINA Do you think that... this thing... do you think it can see me right now?

[Alfred barks a short laugh, takes a long breath and looks at her.]

ALFRED I don't have a shadow of a doubt.

[Blackout]