

ACT ONE**Scene Nine**

(The hotel casino. Continuous. CHRISTINE moves to the roulette table, passing LAWRENCE and ANDRE as she goes.)

LAWRENCE

Any sign of Freddy since we laid the bet?

ANDRE

None. Perhaps the Jackal has realized the folly of his geste.

LAWRENCE

(eyes on Christine)

Keep your eyes open; he'll turn up. I believe it's time the Soap Queen met the Prince.

(He hands ANDRE the dossier, puts on the royal ring and moves to the empty place beside CHRISTINE. She glances at him shyly. He smiles politely. She places her bet. He puts his chips beside hers. They look at each other, and LAWRENCE leans in to introduce himself, when suddenly there is a commotion behind them. The elegant crowd standing around the table begin to react one by one as if they were being goosed or bumped. The seas part, and a young decorated U.S. Army Officer in a wheelchair approaches the table. LAWRENCE gives him a courteous nod, starts to turn back to CHRISTINE, then stops, as he realizes the humble soldier is FREDDY.)

FREDDY

Excuse me, pardon me, I'm sorry.

(He wheels his chair effectively between LAWRENCE and CHRISTINE. A female gambler is crossing. FREDDY seizes the opportunity. With the pretext of getting out of her way, he forces LAWRENCE away from CHRISTINE through the maneuvers of his wheelchair. To a passing Casino patron:)

Excuse me, ma'am. Let me get out of your way.

(He wheels himself back and over LAWRENCE'S foot, then wheels himself back beside CHRISTINE and tries to place his bet with a sad little chip, then:)

Excuse me, Miss, would you mind placing a bet for me? It's sorta hard for me to reach.

CHRISTINE

Of course; what number?

FREDDY

Gee, the way my luck's been running lately... Why don't you pick?

CHRISTINE

(smiles warmly)

Oh, okay. Well, my birthday's in July, I'm the second oldest, I was a Kappa at Ohio

(CHRISTINE)

State... How about four?

(She places the bet. The CROUPIER spins the wheel.)

CROUPIER

Mesdames et messieurs, les jeux sont fait. Numero dix-sept. Rouge.

ALL

Awww...

CHRISTINE

(to FREDDY)

I'm sorry.

FREDDY

(bravely)

That's okay. Excuse me.

(He stifles back a sob and starts to wheel himself away, bumping his way through the crowd as he goes. LAWRENCE leans in to CHRISTINE again, is about to resume his introduction, when:)

CHRISTINE

Excuse me.

(She rises from the table and follows FREDDY out. LAWRENCE and ANDRE look at each other. The lights dim on the casino and come up on the garden just outside, where CHRISTINE is rushing to catch up with the whimpering soldier as he rolls away.)

#10a - Casino Terrace

Pardon me, are you all right?

FREDDY

Thank you, but I'd really rather be alone right now.

CHRISTINE

Oh, I'm sorry.

(She reluctantly starts to turn back inside, when FREDDY lets out a pitiful wail, grabs her hand and jerks her back.)

FREDDY

It's just that chip was my last hope. I thought maybe if I could spin it into enough to pay for the treatment... I'm so naive. I'm sorry; I can't believe I'm telling my troubles to a total stranger like this.

CHRISTINE

I'm Christine Colgate.

FREDDY

Sergeant Fred Benson.

CHRISTINE

(smiles)

See? Now we're not strangers anymore.

FREDDY

(smiles)

I guess you're right.

(then)

I don't mind for myself so much; it's just that Grandma was sorta counting on me to come back and run the farm.

CHRISTINE

Shouldn't the Army pay for your treatment?

FREDDY

It's a little more complicated than that. You see, my problem isn't really physical. It's emotional.

CHRISTINE

You mean -- ?

FREDDY

Yes, I'm afraid what I have is... Dance Fever.

CHRISTINE

What happened?

FREDDY

You see, I was engaged to the most wonderful girl back in the States. We loved to dance. We wanted to be professionals. Then one day some talent scouts came to town with a contest for 'Dance USA.'

CHRISTINE

I love that show.

FREDDY

We too, oh my God. We decided if we won, we'd pay off the farm, put Grandma in a home, sell the horses for glue and live happily ever after. Then suddenly it was the big night... We won! Somehow in all the excitement, we got separated. I looked everywhere. Then I went back to the studio, and there they were. Dancing.

CHRISTINE

Dancing?

FREDDY

Naked.

CHRISTINE

Oh my God. Who was she with?

FREDDY

The 'Dance USA' Orchestra.

CHRISTINE

All of them?

FREDDY

Just the brass section. That night I tried to sleep, but I just kept dreaming of them dancing, making love, dancing, making love...The next morning I woke up, and I was numb from the waist down. I've been this way ever since.

CHRISTINE

There must be someone who can help you.

FREDDY

Well, there is one psychiatrist...Dr. Emil Shüffhausen of the Shüffhausen Clinic in Vienna.

CHRISTINE

Well, why don't you go to him?

FREDDY

A man like Dr. Shüffhausen is in demand all over the world. His fees are astronomical. It's just not something I can handle.

CHRISTINE

How astronomical?

FREDDY

Fifty thousand dollars.

CHRISTINE

That is a lot of money.

(FREDDY sighs and looks away. His face goes white. A young couple is dancing on the casino patio.)

What is it?

#10b - They're Dancing

FREDDY

Oh, God. They're dancing. Dancing!