

MICHAEL VON SIEBENBURG
MELTS THROUGH THE
FLOORBOARDS

by
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The play takes place over several weeks in a major American city. The locations include:

A once elegant, now faded pre-war apartment living room
A bedroom in that same elegantly faded pre-war apartment
The loading dock of a big office building
A battlefield circa 1453, just outside Constantinople
Purgatory

The cast of characters, in order of appearance, are:

OTTO..... 40s/50s, a hulking, brutal warrior from a dark, dark age. Hoping to reclaim Constantinople from the Ottoman Turks.

MICHAEL VON SIEBENBURG... 30s/40s, a retired crusader. A little lost at the moment.

JANE..... 20s/30s, a sophisticated, urban woman. Ready for anything.

TURKISH SOLDIER..... A hulking, brutal warrior from the dark ages. Overconfident.

MARIA..... 20s/30s. A haunting beauty from a dark, dark age. Worried about Michael's spiritual well-being.

SAMMY..... 20s/30s. A retired crusader. Doing what he can to get by.

APRIL..... 30s. An overworked, urban woman. Tired of looking for Mr. Right.

MRS. ROSEMARY..... 70s/80s. A landlady, physically frail but nobody's fool.

HELGA..... A Himmelm Maiden.

ANNA..... Another Himmelm Maiden.

ANGELA..... 20s/30s. A lost soul.

**DOUBLE CASTING ----- SAMMY/VOICE OF TURKISH SOLDIER
MARIA/ANGELA
JANE/HELGA
APRIL/ANNA**

MICHAEL VON SIEBENBURG MELTS THROUGH THE FLOORBOARDSSCENE 1

(In the darkness we hear the sound of medieval battle - swords clanking, horses neighing, the whole bit. As the battle sounds roar then fade, Otto, a brutish, chain-mailed specter from the dark ages enters and plants himself in the light. He clears his throat - a little unnerved, perhaps, by the sight of the 21st Century theater-going audience arrayed before him. He speaks with a thick, 15th Century German accent.)

OTTO

In years past the men would dig the chain mail suits from out their earthen hiding places und hang them in the sun to dry, rust flaking off them like ashes from a fire. They would take the swords of their fathers und their fathers' fathers to the river stones und scrape them clean und sharp. They would gather in the villages und the towns to hear the old songs, eat meat from the forests und the farms, und clasp hands like brothers would. Banners would fly. Metal would glint und sparkle in the morning sunlight und all thoughts would whisper of battle. In years past we fought the infidel, to save our souls, und to feel the strength of being men at the end of a sharpened blade. In years past we lived. We shall live again.

(Romantic music plays. Otto, defiant, pleased with his performance, looks for his exit and leaves. Lights shift, and we find ourselves in...)

SCENE 2

(A once grand, now faded pre-war apartment. Michael, 40s, elegant, mysterious, and Jane, late 20s, sultry, sophisticated, have just finished eating a wonderful meal. Romantic music plays softly in the background. Michael, like Otto, speaks with an accent, but his is more refined.)

JANE

Well. That was a wonderful meal.

MICHAEL

Thank you.

JANE

Sammy was right, you really can cook.

MICHAEL

I know one or two dishes.

JANE

Oh, I'm sure you know more than that.

(An exchange of glances. They drink.)

JANE

Little sausages. I don't think I've ever known a man to serve me little sausages before.

MICHAEL

No?

JANE

Not for dinner, at least.

MICHAEL

Cevapcici.

JANE

Che-vap...?

MICHAEL

The sausages, their name. Che-vap-tsi-tsi.

JANE

Cevapcici.

MICHAEL

Travel inland from the Adriatic, North of Ragusa, East of Diocletian's Tomb. This is the land of these sausages.

JANE

Ah.

MICHAEL

Many influences.

JANE

Oh?

MICHAEL

Magyar. Turk. Gypsy. Jew. All these people, they are in these sausages. You understand?

JANE

I do. Culture-wise, you mean.

MICHAEL

Oh, yes. More wine?

JANE

Please.

MICHAEL

I'll get another bottle.

(Michael exits to the kitchen to retrieve another bottle of wine. Jane calls to him from the dining area.)

JANE

So tender!

MICHAEL(O.S.)

Hmmm?!

JANE

The sausage meat! So juicy! Like a - - I want to say like a potato pancake, or something!

MICHAEL(O.S.)

Yes! Well, that's the tenderizer for you!

JANE

The tenderizer?!

(Michael returns with a fresh bottle.)

MICHAEL

The meat tenderizer. You know, one of those little hammers with the knobbly ends.

JANE

Oh, I know what a meat tenderizer is. But for sausage meat?

MICHAEL

For any meat. It's fallen out of fashion, but I must confess: I tenderize all my meats.

JANE

(Suggestively)

As do I.

(Michael sets about opening the bottle.)

MICHAEL

You know, the thing about the meat tenderizer is the design was actually based on a weapon.

JANE

Is that right?

MICHAEL

A mace, or something like a mace. A great big hammer with knobs and spikes and things like that. A Turkish weapon.

JANE

You seem to know a lot about Turkey.

MICHAEL

It is a - - preoccupation.

JANE

So I gathered.

MICHAEL

But I'm sure you know the stories, The Turks, their crimes against Christendom and so forth.

JANE

No.

MICHAEL

No?

JANE

Not really. But I must say, I like a man with a - -
preoccupation.

MICHAEL

Oh?

JANE

Most of the "men" I know are into video games or the latest
app or whatever. Not very meaty preoccupations if you ask
me. Not compared to crimes against Christendom.

(Michael pops the cork.)

MICHAEL

Ja. Well, it was during the final Siege of Constantinople
- 1453, The Big One - that the Turks really put their
hammers to use.

JANE

Just a splash.

(Michael pours.)

MICHAEL

There were these troops - Austrian troops - stationed on a
bluff overlooking the city, keeping an eye out for the
Ottomans.

JANE

Austrian?

MICHAEL

Volunteers. As the Turks marched on the city, men from
throughout Christendom came to Constantinople - or
Istanbul, as it's known today - to fight the Ottomans, to
make what they thought would be a last stand before the
Muslims overran Europe. Italian, Spanish, even Swiss.
They all considered it God's work to shove a pike into a
Muslim belly, not just in the name of self-defense but as a
good in its own right.

JANE

Oo, this is very strong, isn't it.

MICHAEL

The story?

JANE

The wine.

MICHAEL

It's old, this wine. Very rare. Very, mm, flavorful.

JANE

I'm enjoying it very much.

MICHAEL

I'm glad. Anyway, the soldiers, something like twenty Austrian volunteers, went out onto this bluff, they made camp, waited waited waited, no Turks. Night comes, they go to sleep, sun rises, Turks everywhere.

JANE

No.

MICHAEL

Yes. Drinking their coffee, cooking their kebobs. Lamb. A little Turkish city out of nothing.

JANE

They snuck in in the middle of the night.

MICHAEL

That's right. That was the Turkish way.

JANE

Like thieves.

MICHAEL

Well, like Turks, anyway. So, here are these volunteers, stuck out on this bluff with a sea of Turks between them and their city walls.

JANE

What did they do?

MICHAEL

What could they do? They dug in, or whatever medieval soldiers do, and the siege began. The Turks would come in the morning, they'd fight fight fight, the Turks would retreat, that would be their day. Another - - "splash"?

JANE

Please.

(Michael pours.)

MICHAEL

So, these soldiers spend week after week on this bluff, fighting Turks, living in their own filth, that sort of thing. Eventually they run out of food. The siege was going on and on, the Turks were attacking every day, the volunteers were living in their own feces, and one day the sergeant or whoever sticks his head up and says "Guess what? We're out of gruel!"

JANE

No shit.

MICHAEL

Cross my heart.

JANE

So what did they do then?

MICHAEL

What do you think they did?

JANE

I don't know.

MICHAEL

Guess.

JANE

I don't know. They ate bodies.

MICHAEL

That's absolutely right, they ate bodies. Like in that movie. Bodies all over the place, I mean all over the place, and they not eating for weeks, so what were they supposed to do?

JANE

Eat bodies.

MICHAEL

That's right. First they started with the Turks, because they didn't want to eat their chums. But when they ran out of Turks they had to eat their chums. And you know what?

JANE

No, what?

MICHAEL

Their chums tasted so much better than the Turks they couldn't believe it. The meat was juicy, it was tasty, you could eat it rare, medium rare, it was better. So at first they said "well, of course our men taste better. They're Austrians. We eat right, live right, pray to the right God, why shouldn't our meat taste better than the coffee-drinking Turks?" And then one of the men turned to the others and said "but this one here, this wasn't an Austrian, it was a Turk who had defected to our side. Abdul, or something like that. Why was Abdul's meat as delicious as, say, Otto's?" And they looked at the defector's body, and they looked at the Austrians, and they looked at the Turks, and they tasted a little bit from each, and they agreed "Ja, Abdul tasted just as good." Then one of them noticed how Abdul and the Austrians were all beat to Hell and the Turks were mostly punctured once or twice, because the Austrians used swords - and crossbows and primitive firearms, but mostly swords - and the Turks used these massive war hammers. Then they noticed how truly pulverized the meat from their chums was and how relatively untouched the Turk meat was. Because when the Turks went to war they would just wail on these schwächlinge until they were just a bloody mess. I mean they would hold these guys down and just start wailing on their legs or some such scheisse until they passed out. Then they would SEASON the meat, can you believe that? Secret, ancient, Asiatic seasonings. And THEN they would deliver the death blow. Because they were Turks, that was their way, they loved inflicting pain. That's why they loved war so much - massive opportunities to create new pain situations. Which is also why they were ultimately so terrible at war. At least compared to the Austrians. I mean, these Turkish arschgesichter would be wailing on some poor bastards shins, squeezing out a final few squeals before applying the paprika, or cardamom, or whatever-the-fuck, and then WHAM! A bolt from a crossbow, right through the armor, right through the heart. The Turks lost thousands that way.

JANE

God, I have such a headache all of a sudden.

MICHAEL

So, the city eventually falls, the inhabitants are slaughtered, Constantinople becomes Istanbul, but somehow the Austrians escaped, eventually making their way back to Vienna, saving themselves to fight another day. The strange thing, however, was how well these soldiers looked upon their return. Men of forty had about them the buttery glow of teenagers. Men of Sixty looked ripe und virile. You see, what these Christian volunteers didn't share with the historians of Europe was their discovery that the eating of human flesh was the secret to life everlasting.

JANE

What?

MICHAEL

That a steady diet of specially tenderized, specially seasoned human meat was - is - the secret to immortality. They could feel it, feel the power it gave them after a meal. Like sushi, just much, much more. They didn't tell this to anyone, of course, because they reasoned if they did they would be burned at the stake.

(Beat)

And that is the story of the meat tenderizer.

(Beat)

More wine?

JANE

I think I need to leave now.

(Michael pours.)

MICHAEL

The past still lives with us, you see. Sometimes in the most unexpected of places.

JANE

I said I think I need to leave, now, Michael.

MICHAEL

We can't escape it. We can't escape who we are. I can't, anyway.

JANE

What have I been drinking?

MICHAEL

As I said, an old vintage. Centuries old. Old as me.

JANE
You're joking.

MICHAEL
I'm not.

JANE
I'm going.

(She tries to stand. A gentle tap from Michael
sits her back down.)

MICHAEL
You're staying.

JANE
What are you going to do to me?

MICHAEL
Go to sleep.

(Jane lowers her head and is soon fast asleep.
Lights and romantic music fade as medieval battle
sounds grow to a sword-clanking roar.)

TURK VOICE

Kuzu...kebabi...gibi.....

(The sound of a body collapsing. Lights come up just a bit, enough for us to barely see the action. Otto, badly mutilated, lies center stage. Michael, carrying a crossbow and dressed in medieval soldier garb, rushes to Otto's side.)

OTTO

Who goes there?!

MICHAEL

Otto, it's me.

OTTO

Michael, thank Gott!

MICHAEL

Come on, then, Otto. The others will be done with their coffees soon enough. We have to get you out of here.

OTTO

Nein, Michael. I can't. Go on without me.

MICHAEL

What are you talking about, let's go!

OTTO

He's gotten to my shins, Michael. I can't move.

MICHAEL

Dear Christian Gott im Himmel, what has he done to you?!

OTTO

He's pulverized them, Michael. My shins. Dear Gott, Michael, my shins!

MICHAEL

Here, put your arm around my neck, I'll carry you back.

OTTO

Nein, Michael. It's too late for that.

MICHAEL

But Otto-

OTTO

Too late! Just stay with me a moment.

MICHAEL

Easy, Otto.

OTTO

I saw a patch of moss out here by the rocks. I thought I could dig it out and bring it back before anyone saw me. You know. For varieties sake.

MICHAEL

Don't worry about the moss, Otto. I'll make sure it gets back to the outpost.

OTTO

For a nice salad or something. Something nice for the men. Or a side or something. Steamed. You know, like spinach.

MICHAEL

We'll make something delicious with it.

OTTO

Don't let them take Constantinople, Michael. Don't let them take it!

MICHAEL

We won't, Otto.

OTTO

Think of your soul, if nothing else! Whatever crimes we may or may not have committed, all will be forgiven if we push back the infidel! So push them back, Michael!

MICHAEL

I will, Otto.

OTTO

To Antioch! To Jerusalem! Take your blade and- ACH! This is it! I'm going to Jesus!

MICHAEL

I'm here with you, Otto.

OTTO

I can see the light, now, Michael! It's blinding me!

MICHAEL

It won't be long now, Otto!

OTTO

Steam it, Michael! Use some of the paprika we found on Abdul! Or some ground cumin, that's also nice!

MICHAEL

I will, Otto.

OTTO

Und Michael?

MICHAEL

Yes, Otto?

OTTO

Don't let them eat my body.

MICHAEL

What?

OTTO

Don't let them eat my body, Michael! Promise me! On your word as a Christian. I want to meet my maker whole.

MICHAEL

I promise you, Otto.

OTTO

Say it, Michael! On your word as a Christian!

MICHAEL

On my word as a Christian.

OTTO

You won't let them eat me!

MICHAEL

You won't let them eat me!

OTTO

Nein! You won't let them eat me!

MICHAEL

Right, sorry. I won't let - - "them" eat you.

OTTO

Wait a minute! Who is "them"? In your mind how are you defining- uh... Jesus?! Is that you?!

MICHAEL

Otto!

OTTO

I'm going, Michael. Farewell, my friend. I'll be watching you from Himmel. Forever. Und remember, Michael... remember...Michael...remember...

(Lights fade as Otto's voice becomes fainter, then disappears altogether. In the dark we hear the voice of a woman who, like Michael, speaks with a refined German accent.)

MARIA(O.S.)

Michael.

(Beat, no response.)

MARIA(O.S.)

Michael.

(Beat, still no response.)

MARIA(O.S.)

It's me, Michael, wake up.

(Silence, then)

MICHAEL(O.S.)

Hello?

MARIA(O.S.)

Turn on the light, Michael, I'm tired of sitting here in the dark.

(Beat.)

MICHAEL(O.S.)

Maria?

MARIA(O.S.)

Don't be afraid, Michael. I haven't come to hurt you. I've come to take you home.

(Michael turns on the light by his bed and listens.)

MICHAEL

Hello?

(He listens some more, peering into the darkness of his apartment.)

MICHAEL

Maria?

(No response. After a moment, Michael turns the light back off. Battle sounds rise then fall, replaced by the murmur of a busy city street.)

SCENE 4

(Sammy, wiry, strangely charismatic, sits on a loading dock beside April, a cosmopolitan woman. Sammy holds a milkshake from which he slurps from time to time. Like Michael, he speaks with an accent. April smokes.)

SAMMY

Loneliness is a hunger, a hunger of the soul. It creeps into the sinews, into the bones. It becomes a part of you.

APRIL

You see a lot.

SAMMY

I see what I see.

(Sammy slurps, taking a moment to take April's measure.)

SAMMY

I look at you and I see a woman who spends too much time in health clubs, in night clubs. I see a woman who dances in expensive clothes.

APRIL

I like expensive clothes.

SAMMY

Of course you do, but who are they for, these clothes? That's my question to you. Who do you expect to meet by wearing them?

APRIL

I don't know. Someone nice.

SAMMY

Nice?

APRIL

Someone to talk to, to trust.

SAMMY

You don't want nice.

APRIL

No?

No.

SAMMY

Who, then?

APRIL

SAMMY
I will tell you, but you have to open your mind to hear me,
to hear what I'm saying.

APRIL
My mind is open.

SAMMY
No, my dear, it is not.

APRIL
It is.

SAMMY
I don't believe so, no.

(She takes a few breaths.)

APRIL
It is. Now it is.

(He moves closer, transfixing her just the
slightest bit with his gaze.)

SAMMY
Yes?

APRIL
Yes.

SAMMY
Open?

APRIL
Open.

(He moves closer still, peering deeply into her
eyes, gradually putting her into a mild trance.)

SAMMY
Yes. Yes, I see that now.

APRIL

So? Who do I want?

SAMMY

What everyone wants. Someone to give yourself to. Completely. Perhaps even - - literally.

APRIL

Literally?

(He takes another sip from his milkshake.)

SAMMY

Let me tell you something, something true. Once upon a time there were men - not very nice men - who would stand tall before a sea of troubles, and they would do it all for you - for women like you. Once upon a time, women like you - beautiful women, fierce and resourceful women - would spend their days tilling the fields and their nights dancing barefoot before the kettle fires. When called, the men - your men - would reclaim their pikes long hidden within cottage walls, they would form ranks and march out to meet the bloody Turk on the field of battle. You think you are strong now because you wear a power suit to work, you make long distance calls for free, and your secretary nearly always does as you command. But you are not strong. Not as you used to be.

APRIL

No?

SAMMY

Of course not, no. You are hungry, that's why. Hungry for a man - and I'm going to delve a little deeper here - for a man who would kill for you, who would burn for you, who would strip the baubles from off the Turken corpses and present them as gifts to you. You may not mention it at the office parties, at the Thanksgiving dinners, but you ache for a man such as this. You hunger for him. And you know what?

APRIL

No. What?

SAMMY

He hungers for you. He hungers for you very, very much.

(April blinks, emerging from her mild trance-state. Sammy sips his milkshake.)

APRIL

What did you say your friend's name was?

SAMMY

Michael. Siebenburg. The greatest guy you'll ever want to meet. And a baron, to boot.

APRIL

A baron?

SAMMY

Like I say, a really special guy. Easy to talk to, a great cook. Text me. I'll set it up.

(She gets herself ready to go.)

APRIL

Listen, it was really nice talking to you, um...

SAMMY

Sammy.

APRIL

Sammy. I'm surprised we never met before.

SAMMY

The mailroom is a world away, especially from your floor.

APRIL

The fourteenth floor.

SAMMY

A most unhappy floor. For you. But not for long.

(April turns to go.)

SAMMY

And April.

(April stops.)

APRIL

Yeah?