

SPARKS!



A Scientific Adventure
by
Andrew Hilton

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*Cover: Annette Woollett as Maya & Ron Cook as Albert
All Photos: John Miles*

Characters

Count Leonid Grabalovsky

Albert

Maya*

Peter

President Igor

Palace Guard

The play is set in the present day, but in a small, European mountain republic cut off from the rest of the world more than a century ago. Costumes and properties should show the consequences of this isolation without in any way being 'frozen' in the Victorian period; some more modern touches are essential.

**Originally named Lucy*

Sparks! was commissioned and first performed on October 7th 1974 by the Molecule Theatre of Science at London's Mermaid Theatre with the following cast:

Count Grabolovsky	Christopher Saul
Albert & Palace Guard	Ron Cook
Maya	Annette Woollett
Peter	Philip Davis
Igor	Edward Phillips
<i>Director</i>	<i>Andrew Hilton</i>
<i>Designer</i>	<i>Sarah Paulley</i>
<i>Composer & Musical Director</i>	<i>Colin Tarn</i>
<i>Deputy Musical Director</i>	<i>David O'Brien</i>
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	<i>Dorian Kelly</i>
<i>Scientific Deviser & Consultant</i>	<i>Geoffrey Sneed</i>

It was subsequently taken on a National Tour. Further productions - and National Tours - include the following:

Count Grabolovsky	Allan Zipson
Albert & Palace Guard	Adrian Rondeau
Maya	Moira Hughes
Peter	Peter Landon
Igor	Brian Ellis
<i>Director</i>	<i>Josephine Wilson</i>

Count Grabolovsky	Ken Bones
Albert & Palace Guard	James Matthews
Maya	Lilian Evans
Peter	Paul Large
Igor	John Dallimore
<i>Director</i>	<i>Sally Miles</i>

Count Grabolovsky	Anthony Millan
Albert & Palace Guard	Michael Jaimeson
Maya	Lucy Fenwick
Peter	Mike Elles
Igor	Robert Kingswell
<i>Director</i>	<i>Josephine Wilson</i>

Count Grabolovsky	Don Dryden
Albert & Palace Guard	Derek Hewitson
Maya	Dee Robillard
Peter	Michael Crompton
Igor	Jonathan Fryer
<i>Director</i>	<i>Paul Tomlinson</i>

The design for all these productions was Sarah Paulley's, the music Colin Tarn's, the Production Manager Forbes Nelson; and Geoffrey Sneed (then Director of the Children's Gallery at the Science Museum) remained the Scientific Consultant.

Act One

Scene 1

A clearing in a forest, flooded with cold moonlight. In the distance, the tips of snow-covered mountains.

Music.

*Enter **Count Grabolovsky**. He is dressed in modern clothes and wears mirror shades. He surveys the clearing with a powerful electric torch and smiles.*

Count Albert! Albert!

*Enter **Albert**, raggedly dressed. On his back is a large box. He is paying out electric cable.*

Albert Yes master?

Count We've found it. Just as I remember - the Great Clearing in the Dark Forest. See, paths lead in from every direction - from North, South, East and West. Some poor ignorant present is bound to pass this way before dawn. If only there wasn't a full moon. I wanted a night as black as my own purpose.

Albert I wanted a good night sleep. It's a cold and g-ghostly night to be out.

Count Don't snivel, man. Tomorrow we'll be living in luxury in the Presidential Palace. We'll be done with the Dark Forest forever.

Albert Yes, master.

Count Quickly now! Unpack!

Music. *From Albert's box they unpack an electric light socket, a low stand, a switch on a long lead and a very large, clear-glass tungsten bulb.*

Count Socket ... stand ... switch. Good. Connect them up ... And last, the electric bulb itself! A present from the great world beyond the mountains to the forgotten people of Igoria!

He fits the bulb into the socket.

 There. Give me the switch.

He glances round the clearing to make sure they are not observed.

 Now ...

*He flashes the light on and off. **Music.***

 Excellent! Excellent! My plot begins at last! A hundred years cut off by the snow from the rest of the world. If all you knew of light, Albert, was just the oil-lamp and the candle, what would you do if you came face to face with that on a dark cold night in the heart of the Dark Forest?

Albert I'd run for it, master.

Count You'd run for your life! Within minutes rumour and panic will spread like wildfire. 'Help, help, there's magic in the forest! Help!' That's when I, Count Grabolovsky, will strike. That's when I'll seize power from President Igor and have this ignorant little country for my own. So, all is ready. We just hide in the

trees and wait.

He takes a small copper plate from the box, reads it, smiles, and props it against the lamp base.

Come, Albert.

He takes the switch and he and Albert disappear into the trees.

Albert Ooh, spider in me shirt!

Count Shhh!

Music. *After a few moments, in the distance, two voices singing.*

Albert There's someone coming!

Count Quiet!

*The voices approach. Enter **Maya** and **Peter**, one of them carrying a lantern. As they come face to face with the bulb it flashes on. They scream and flee into the audience.*

Maya What was that?

Peter I don't know. I don't want to know! Let's run!

Maya Shouldn't we have a closer look?

Peter No!

Maya You're a coward, Peter.

Peter I'm not. I'm just not stupid, that's all.

Maya Oh, come on, let's see what it is.

Music. *They take a few steps. The light flashes again. They have to shield their eyes from it.*

Peter Agh!

Maya Peter!

They take a few more steps.

Peter *[Not looking]* Is it a giant candle?

Maya No.

Peter An oil-lamp?

Maya No!

Peter Then what is it?

Maya I don't know. It's like a lightning flash.

She edges closer.

Peter Careful!

Maya There's something there, look. Something with writing on.

She edges still closer.

Peter Don't touch it!

Maya ignores him and reaches out for the copper plate.

Maya Got it.

They retreat to a safe distance.

'Spread this message throughout the land. My power is come with this demand: Igor must bow to my command, or the people feel the fire in my hand.' What can it mean? President Igor's in some kind of danger.

Peter So are we! Come on, Maya, let's go.

Maya Wait. If Igor's in danger we've got to warn him, haven't we? I mean, take this [*the copper plate*] to him and tell him what we've seen.

Peter Well ...

Maya We can't pretend we haven't seen anything.

Peter No, 'spose not.

Maya We must take it to the Palace now. Which way is it? That path there, to the North?

Peter Yes.

Maya Right ... Come on ...

Going, Maya steps on the cable.

Wait, what's this?

Peter What?

Giving the copper plate to Peter, she bends down and takes hold of the cable. Pulling it, she sees it is attached to the lamp.

A rope?

Maya I don't think so ... No, feel it, it's smooth, like plastic ... and it's solid, I think ... [*Squeezing it*] No! No it's not. It's like a tube, Peter! With something solid inside it!

She sniffs it, shakes it, listens to it.

It must be attached to that thing for a reason ... Look, it leads right off into the trees. Shall we follow it and see where it goes?

Peter No! Let's just take this to the Palace like you said.

Maya I'm not so sure. There's some sort of trickery going on here ... Why don't you go to the Palace? I'll stay here and follow this tube-thing as far as it goes.

Peter But, Maya ... !

Maya Oh, go on, Peter! I'll be all right. You give that to Igor and tell him everything we've seen.

Peter I'll tell the first person I meet!

Maya Yes - no, no don't do that. That could just cause a panic. Please, Peter, just the President, no-one else. I'll catch you up as soon as I can. By noon at the latest. Have you got that?

Peter Are you sure you'll be safe?

Maya Of course I will! It hasn't tried to eat us, has it?

Peter No ...

Maya Then go on. And hurry - hurry!

Peter Right. See you at the Palace then.

Maya Yes - bye!

Peter runs off.

Now where does this thing lead? Through those trees and over there somewhere ... Can you help me? Can anyone see it? ... Is that it? Yes! Where does it go?

Ad lib to an audience exit ...

It goes off this way. I'd better follow it. Wish me luck, everyone!

... and Maya leaves.

Music. Enter the **Count** and **Albert**.

Count Meddling little fool! Follow that cable to its end, *Maya*, and you'll get a most unpleasant surprise! Come, *Albert*, we'll take a short-cut back to the hideout and prepare her a welcome she'll never forget. No little squirt of a girl is going to spoil my plans!

Music.

Exeunt.

Scene 2

An office in the Presidential Palace. A door. A high window, with the blind drawn. A desk and a chair. Books, charts etc.

*Darkness. Enter **President Igor**, carrying a lighted candle. He is gently singing the refrain of the Igorian National Anthem:*

Igor We never greet a German
We never sight a Swiss
Frenchmen and Italians
Have given us a miss!
We've been lost and quite forgotten
Since eighteen eighty-five ...

Standing on the chair, he opens the blind. Daylight floods in.

*... But we all love Igoria,
May she long, long survive!*

He snuffs out the candle with his fingers

Ouch!

Humming, he sits at the desk and opens some papers. After a moment, a loud knock at the door.

Come in, Chancellor!

Enter **Peter**. *Igor does not look up.*

Peter Er ...

Igor Won't be a moment. Just going through my speech to parliament. This urgent need for a cleaner and brighter form of candle, you know. We've got to put our minds to it, Chancellor - Oh! Who are you?

Peter Peter, sir. Peter from the forest.

Igor I didn't think ... have you an appointment?

Peter Er ...

Igor consults a dusty diary.

Igor (This day, date, month, year). No. No, you haven't. Look, if you want to see me you have to fill in a pink form. That's the law, Peter. Go and ask for the tall thin man whose boots squeak and he'll give you a pink form. All right?

Peter No. It's too important. It can't wait. Look!

He thrusts the copper plate into Igor's hand.

Igor Can't wait for a pink - what's this?

Peter We found it. Maya - that's my sister - and me. In the Dark Forest.

Igor Piece of copper. Ah - something scratched into it ...

He has to climb up to the window again to read it.

'Spread this message throughout the land. My power is come with this demand: Igor must bow to my command, or the people feel the fire in my hand.' Is this a joke?

Peter No! 'Least, I don't think it is.

Igor It's either a joke or a threat, isn't it? *Where* did you find it?

Peter In the Dark Forest. The Great Clearing.

Igor Just lying on the ground?

Peter No, not exactly. Sort of propped up.

Igor Against a tree.

Peter No. No, it wasn't a tree. It was a great big light.

Igor Eh?

Peter Yes! *[Exaggerating]* It was huge - bigger than me! And it flashed, on and off - like lightning! It was magic!

Igor What? Oh, my goodness, where's the Chancellor? Must find the Chancellor! Help! Help! HELP! Shout, boy, help me raise the Palace! Chancellor!

Peter I ... I don't think we should.

Igor What? Why ever not?

Peter It might cause a panic.

Igor Whadyoumean - 'cause a panic'? There is a panic. I'm panicking! Chanc - ! D'you know, Peter, you are an exceedingly sensible chap. What good's a panic? In fact, it could be exactly what this is all about, couldn't it - strange goings-on in a forest in the middle of the night? *[Mopping his brow]* Now, come on, Igor - cool, calm, think this one through ... This flashing thing - you're sure it wasn't, er, some enormous candle? Or a new-fangled oil lamp?

Peter No.

Igor Or just a big bonfire?

Peter No, honestly. There was no flame at all.

Igor No flame?

Peter No. And whatever it was, it all seemed to happen inside a great bubble of glass.

Igor Very peculiar. Very magical, Peter. Mind you, somewhere there's got to be some real scientific explanation for it, hasn't there? Burning magnesium or something. Don't you do chemistry at school?

Peter No.

Igor Pity. Oh well. What about some person lurking? Did you see anyone?

Peter No.

Igor There were no fishy noises?

Peter No.

Igor Nothing else suspicious at all?

Peter Well ... we did find ...

Igor What?

Peter It was a long thing. Like a sort of plastic rope. Fixed to the flashing thing.

Igor What do you mean - 'long'? A metre long?

Peter No, miles long! It disappeared, right into the trees. Maya said she thought it was a tube.

Igor A tube?

Peter Yes. Full of something quite hard. She was going to follow it, while I brought that copper plate to you.

Igor And then she was going to come here?

Peter Yes. She'll be here by noon. At the latest, she said.

Igor I see ... I see. Plucky girl, Peter. She's a plucky girl. But I don't like the sound of this. 'Igor must bow to my command, or the people feel the fire in my hand.' What we've got here, Peter, is some person, some villain, who's cooked up some strange machine, or some chemical what-not, he's put it right in the middle of the forest where it'll scare everyone stiff - and when he's got us all wobbling in our wellies about him he thinks he's just going to walk in here and take over. It's - it's downright undemocratic, Peter, I'm an elected President. Well, he's reckoned without me. 'Igor the iron-willed' they called me in my play-group, you know! Yes, he's bitten off more than he can chew. Here by lunchtime, she said?

Peter Noon.

Igor Yes, noon. Then I suppose we'd better wait. Wait for her to report ... Just gone half-past nine. I wonder if there's anything useful we can be doing in the meantime? Yes, of course, look out some kit, prepare ourselves for the forest, just in case.

Peter In case what?

Igor In case she doesn't turn up. In case it's Igor and Peter to the rescue!

Peter Oh!

Igor Don't you worry, we'll sort this one out. Oh, but I think we'd better keep this

whole business strictly entre nous, O.K.? ... Between ourselves, Peter.

Peter Oh! Yes, of course.

Igor That's the spirit. Come on, we'll make a bee-line for the Presidential Stores. In a couple of hours we'll be ready for anything! This way!

Music.

Exeunt.

Scene 3

A room in a stone cottage. A door to the outside. A smaller door, to an inner room, to one side of a large open fireplace. A small window, shuttered and barred. A water tap. Roughly fixed between the fireplace and the inner door, a row of two-pin plug sockets on a batten, the bunched cables clearly seen to lead from the inner room. Centre, a kitchen table with two chairs and a cushion. Above the table hangs a naked bulb, powered directly from the socket batten and operated by a string-pull from the light itself. Hanging on the walls, a circuit plan of the Great Hall in the Presidential Palace and coils of rope, electric cable and insulated wire. On the mantelpiece, various electric bulbs, plus and minus signs fixed to crocodile clips, a breadbin containing a large, rectangular loaf, large jars of salt and pepper, and a wooden spoon. In the fireplace, a crowbar, a large copper plate and two steel rods. Elsewhere, an enormous, empty fishtank, trucked and covered with a cloth.

*The room is dark, but for daylight spilling under the main door. A key rattles. The door opens. Enter the **Count** and **Albert**. The Count switches on the light, looks carefully back along their path, then shuts and locks the door.*

Count Good. The girl's not in sight yet. We must get on with our work.

Albert What? We haven't slept a wink since the night before last!

Count There'll be time enough to sleep when we're installed in the Palace. Now we must work. If I guess correctly, President Igor will want to see the light in the Clearing for himself. So tonight I must have new wonders to show him. You will have to finish this circuit plan yourself and have it ready to take with us. Understood?

Albert Yes, master.

Count Good.

*He is unlocking the inner door when **Maya** appears at the back of the audience, still following the cable.*

Maya *[To audience]* Hello ... Can anyone see the tube? *[Ad lib]*

Count What's that? A noise in the trees? It must be the girl. She's been quicker than I thought. Albert!

Albert Yes, master?

Count Lie flat on the floor - over there, see. And pretend to be dead.

Albert Pretend to be dead? Whatever - ?

Count Do as I tell you - quickly!

Albert stretches out on the floor. The Count peeps through the shuttered window.

Good. She's following the cable round the back of the cottage.

He quietly unlocks the door.

Now ... absolutely still ...

He switches off the light. Darkness.

Albert Master ... !

Count Shhhh!

The Count stands behind the door. After a few moments Maya opens the door slowly and steps in.

Maya Hello ... hello ... Anyone here?

In the daylight spreading from the door, she sees Albert.

Who's that?

*She kneels by him. The Count shuts and locks the door. Darkness. Maya gasps. The light snaps on, the Count's hand on the string-pull. Maya screams. **Music.***

Count Welcome, Maya! Welcome to our little home.

Maya What? Who are you? What's going on? [*Pointing at the light*] And what's that?



Annette Woollett as Maya, Christopher Saul as the Count & Ron Cook as Albert

Count Allow me to explain. I am Count Leonid Grabolovsky, soon to be made the new President of Igoria.

Maya President? We already have a President -

Count A surprise, I know. But you see, Maya, I have developed a power - a unique

power - greater than anything Igoria has seen before. This light is only the least of what it can do for me. When at last I meet President Igor I shall give him a choice: resign his authority to me and see this dark and forgotten little country enjoy my power with me, or refuse and watch Igoria burn to ashes in my hands. Does that answer your questions? Albert, a chair for our young friend. She's a little confused after her strange journey. Do sit down, my dear ... That's better.

Maya I ...

Count Yes?

Maya I don't believe you. I think it's all a trick. What is it, that thing? What's your game?

Count It's no game, Maya! No game for any of us - least of all for you. In a few hours time I shall reign supreme in the Presidential Palace. You will be a prisoner here, where you could just remain for the rest of your life - unless, that is, you choose to behave and keep that long nose of yours out of trouble.

Maya You'll never frighten me, you devil!

Count We'll see about that! This should tame your mischievous spirit!

He has grabbed a rope from the wall and is binding Maya to her chair.

Maya No! No! No!

Count Understand this, Maya: there is no way out of this cottage except through that door. The lock on it is quite foolproof and only I have the key ... Right, we'll see how that feels for a few hours. Now, Albert, I have work to do in the den. You get on with that circuit plan. I shall want the Palace flooded with elec - with my own light for my investiture!

Albert Yes, master.

Count And, Albert ...

Albert Yes, master?

Count Remember what you have to lose - if you get up to any of your tricks.

Albert Yes, master.

The Count disappears into the inner room, shutting the door behind him. Albert sits at the table and concentrates on the circuit plan. Maya watches him accusingly, struggles with her bonds, then sighs.

You sit tight, Miss. There's nothing you can do. Nothing anyone can do.

Maya Huh! It's all very well for you, waiting for your share of the winnings!

Albert What? No, that's not true, Miss. It's not like that at all.

Maya Isn't it?

Albert No! You don't think I work for the Count of my own free will, do you?

Maya Of course.

Albert I don't - truly I don't. I'm a prisoner too. Have been for a few years now.

Maya What?

Albert He just picked on me. He needed a hideout here in the forest and someone to

work for him. There was nothing I could do. He just forced his way in.

Maya You mean this cottage is yours?

Albert Yes. He said if I didn't do what he told me he'd burn the place down. 'Course, now I know what he's up to he won't let me out of his sight.

Maya I see. I'm sorry. But you do know all about this power he's got?

Albert [*Glancing nervously toward the inner door*] Not all about it. I've learnt a lot, but not everything. He keeps some things about electricity a secret.

Maya 'Electricity'? Did you say electricity?

Albert Yes, that's what it is.

Maya Electricity's what makes the lightning flash!

Albert Yes! But it's what works this light up there as well.

Maya tries to lean away from it.

Maya It can't! It can't! He can't control the lightning!

Albert No, but he can control electricity. And so can everyone - in the world beyond the mountains!

Maya What?

Albert Yes! In France and Germany and Italy - all over the world! They've been using it for years. For light and for working machines - and lots of things I can't understand at all - like carrying your voice along wires hundreds of miles long. They take it completely for granted. They'd have a really good laugh if they knew Igoria was still using candles and oil-lamps.

Maya How did he find out about it?

Albert He's been out of Igoria.

Maya Over the mountains? Through the snow?

Albert Yes!

Maya But nobody's been over the mountains for over a hundred years!

Albert He has! He found a route years ago. He's been to Moscow, Paris, Vienna - all over Europe. I thought he was lying at first, but he wasn't. He's learnt all sorts of things you could never learn here in Igoria. It's a different world out there now.

Maya Why hasn't he told anyone? Why's he kept it all to himself?

Albert He thinks if he keeps quiet about where he's been and about everything he's seen out there he can pass off electricity as his own mysterious power, get the whole country terrified of him and then trick President Igor into making him President instead.

Maya The villain!

Albert What makes it worse - once he is President he's still going to keep all his knowledge to himself. Igoria will be just the same as ever, but with him for President instead of Igor.

Maya Oo, I'd like to -

The inner door opens and the Count enters. Albert busies himself with the circuit plan.

Count Getting on with it, Albert?

Albert Yes, master.

The Count takes a bulb from the mantelpiece and returns to the inner room, shutting the door behind him.

Maya *[Very hushed]* So, did he ... did he bring this electricity back with him?

Albert It's not quite like that. You don't carry it about like a sack of coal. No, he's just brought back the know-how and some of the things to use it with. Like that bulb. And the cable you followed through the forest. He makes the stuff through there. I don't know how - I'm never allowed in. All I see is this end of it - these wires and lights and things.

Maya None of it makes any sense to me. First I see a great flashing light in the middle of the forest, and now that, burning brighter than any candle I've ever seen! But I can't see a flame or a wick, or a trace of smoke!

Albert Oh, there's no flame, Maya - no flame. Look ...

He takes the largest bulb from the mantelpiece.

See that tiny little wire inside there?

Maya Yes.

Albert That just gets hot. So hot that it glows white and makes the light.

Maya How? Why?

Albert Because of the electric current that passes through it.

Maya What?

Albert The electric current. You've heard of a current of water, haven't you? Water running along in a river?

Maya Yes, of course.

Albert That's what electricity does. It runs, flows along these wires in a current. See, from these sockets here, they connect through all those wires to the Count's electricity supply in there. Through a plug, like this, along these wires and through the bulb.

Maya So the wires are hollow.

Albert No! That's just it - they're more solid than you and me.

He takes a cable from the wall.

See ...

Maya How could anything flow through solid wire?

Albert I don't know. But electricity does. Invisibly, too!

Maya Invisibly?

Albert Yes.

Maya Does that mean it's flowing out of all those empty sockets onto the floor?

She lifts her feet off the floor.

Albert Shhhh! No, no, it won't do that. It won't flow just any old how. It's very particular where it flows. For a start, it won't flow through the air. Only through

a conductor. Good job, too, or we'd have the stuff all over the place!

Maya A conductor waves a stick in front of a band!

Albert Ah, but that's not the only kind, is it? Anyway, with the stick you guide the band, don't you? Lead the players right through the tune and stop them getting lost on the way. It's like that with the electric current. It's conducted along by the wire. Metal's a good conductor, you see, and the current can flow along it easily. But lots of things are bad conductors. Some things will hardly conduct at all. Like wood, and rubber, and plastic. They're called 'insulators'. Because they insulate things from the electricity. See?

Maya shakes her head, bewildered. Albert spots the cushion on the chair.

I know ... it's like if I try to thump you, but there's this cushion in the way ... like that. You're insulated, aren't you? The cushion's between you and my fist so the blow doesn't get through and hurt you. It's like that with this wire. It's insulated all round with plastic, so that when we pick it up there's something between us and the wire - something that won't conduct the electricity. See, there isn't a bare wire anywhere there, is there?

Maya No, but why's that so important?

Albert Because if you touched a bare wire coming out of one of those sockets, the current would flow into you and give you an electric shock! It'd burn you very badly - maybe even kill you!

Maya Ooooh!

Albert It's all right. You're quite safe as long as it's properly insulated.

Hammer blows are heard from the den.

Here, I'm forgetting. I must get on with this circuit plan. He'll be catching me out shortly.

He returns to his seat and works in silence for a few moments.

Maya What is that?

Albert *[Working on]* A circuit plan for the Great Hall in the Presidential Palace.

Maya Circuits of what?

Albert Electricity. It's a plan of how we'll wire up the lights for when the Count's made President.

Maya What have circuits got to do with it?

Albert Everything! The current wouldn't flow without a circuit. It's the most important thing.

Maya Would you ... would you show me?

Albert I can't -

Maya Please, Albert!

Albert Well ...

He listens at the inner door.

He's still busy. *[To audience]* Shall I show her what a circuit is? ... Shhh! Right!

He picks up the largest bulb.

First I need a bulb. *[Putting it down again]* Well, no - something like a bulb, but bigger, to show you what happens inside. So, two rods ... yes, these'll do ... and something to stick them in ...

Spotting the breadbin, he takes out the large rectangular loaf.

Ah, the Count's supper, this'll do. You won't tell him though, will you? ... Good! ... Now, inside a bulb there are two rods sticking up ... like this ...

He pushes the rods lengthwise into the loaf.

One ... two. And joining them at the top is the little wire that glows white-hot and makes the light. I've got a piece here, look ...

He takes a piece of fusewire from his pocket.

This'll do ... This joins the two rods ... like that. I'll make it all wiggly, like it is in a bulb ... there. So now we've got a bulb. All except the glass covering - you'll have to imagine that. What we need now is an electricity supply.

Maya Can I be that?

Albert Yes. Your feet can be the plug. Put them together - straight out ... that's it. Good. So we've got a bulb over there, and an electricity supply over here. All we've got to do is connect them up. So ...

He takes a length of plastic-covered wire [perhaps brown] and puts one end of it under Maya's left foot.

Starting here, at this hole in the socket, the current flows into this wire, through a plug, of course ... goes along the wire and into this rod here ... I'll just attach it ...

He clips or twists the wire-end to the bottom of the first rod, the loaf now standing on the front edge of the table.

That's it. Then it flows up this rod, through the little wiggly wire that glows white-hot and makes the light, and down this rod, and back along another wire ... I'll just attach that ... there we are ... It flows back along this wire and - through the plug, of course - into the other hole in the socket ... there. See? That's an electric circuit. A complete path, out of one hole, through the bulb, and back into the other hole. And I don't know why, but if it isn't complete, the current won't flow. That's why the circuit's so important.

Maya You mean, the bulb wouldn't light, even if you broke the circuit there, when the current's on its way back to the socket?

Albert No, it wouldn't.

Maya Oh ... But ... why does the little wiggly wire inside the bulb get white-hot when the rest of the wire doesn't?

Albert That's easy.

He illustrates this with his hands behind the model.

It's much thinner, you see. Too thin, really, to comfortably carry all the electricity that comes rushing along that bigger wire from the plug. So it tries to resist it, to stop it going through. But it can't. The current forces its way through. So the little wire gets all hot and bothered about it and glows - white-hot. Does it begin to make sense?

Maya I think so. But one thing ...

Albert What's that?

Maya Why aren't there two wires up there, leading to the light?

Albert There are! All that's happened, you see, is the two wires have been put together ... like that ... and then covered with a bigger plastic tube ... like that. But there's still a circuit. One wire leading into the bulb, one wire leading out of it. See?

*[Singing] Though it may be
a bit of a mystery
electricity is careful where to go!
Never keen to take a chance
a current won't advance
along a path unless it knows
it's going to find that it can flow ...*

*Around a circuit.
a circular circuit,
round a path complete and quite without a gap!
Currents like to be conducted
round a route so well constructed
that there's never a stop, never a flap,
never a moment's pause in fact
in the circuit!
The circular circuit,
the path that doesn't stop or fizzle out,
for as long as it's unbroken
the current's free to flow
through the wire inside the bulb
to make it brightly glow!*

He encourages Maya to join in and the audience to clap.

*That's the circuit,
the circular circuit,
that's the path that doesn't stop or fizzle out,
for as long as it's unbroken ... [ad infin]*

*The **Count** enters unseen, carrying a large and heavy case. **Discords!***

Count Clever, Albert, very clever!

He pulls the circuit model apart.

But I don't remember telling you to make my secrets public property!

He grabs a rope from the wall.

I see I shall have to make sure your tongue doesn't wag again. Sit down!

Albert But, master, I can explain ...

The Count forces Albert into a chair and ties him to it.

Count Explain? Oh yes, I can see just how well you can explain. And how I can never trust you again. See, Maya, what's become of your stupid curiosity? This time tomorrow, Albert could have become one of the richest men in Igoria. *[Gagging him]* Now ... he must be silenced, and stay here a prisoner with you.

Maya You monster, you monster, you monster!

Count So much for your lesson in 'electricity'.

Maya You won't get away with it! We'll beat you, if it's the last thing we do!

Count You haven't a hope. Nothing can stop me now. Tonight, in the Great Clearing, I shall demonstrate yet more marvels of my fantastic power. By noon tomorrow I shall be sworn in as President of Igoria!

*[Singing] Spread this message throughout the land:
My power is come with this demand,
Igor must bow to my command
or the people feel the fire in my hand!*

He picks up his case and sweeps out of the cottage. Albert and Maya exchange looks as the door slams and a key turns.

Fade.

Scene 4

The Office in the Palace. Igor, who might be dressed for the Amazon, or the Arctic - or both - is pacing up and down. Peter is sitting miserably on top of a bulging and festooned rucksack. Igor stops pacing and consults a pocket-watch.

Igor Five and twenty past four. Still no sign of your sister. When did she say she'd be here by?

Peter Noon. At the latest!

Igor Yes. So more than four hours late already, and soon it'll be dark. You know, Peter, I've a sneaking suspicion something's gone wrong.

Peter Yes.

Igor We'd better make a start.

Peter *[Leaping up]* At last!

Igor This mystery's gone far enough. Maya must be rescued and this Mystery Man cut down to size! Right. Got the snow boots?

Peter Yes!

Igor Compass?

Peter Yes!

Igor Thermos flask?

Peter Yes!

Igor Sun cream, fly whisk and extra thick socks?

Peter Yes, yes, and yes.

Igor Baked beans? Tinned cream? Hot water bottle? Tent? Whistle? Ropes, Paint pot? Ice picks? Goal posts?

Peter What? No -

Igor Nearly caught you out there, didn't I? Right. And last but not least, the army's very latest rapid-fire blunderbuss! Splendid! I'll take the blunderbuss, you take

the rest.

Peter What?

Igor Strong lad like you - won't feel a thing. Go on ... up, up! That's it. Comfortable?

Peter [*Gasping*] Yes.

Igor Good! Then let our expedition commence!

They sing as they exit through the audience:

*We'll search the darkening forest,
we'll tramp all through the night,
we'll scour each copse and clearing
for the flash of a magic light!
We'll swap our fears for courage,
we'll arm us for the fight,
we'll search with all our might!*

*Oh, search search, search,
we shall not be afraid,
with a blunderbuss beside me
through every ghostly glade!
The only things to scare us
and make us start with fright
are spiders, beetles, leeches, lice
and orange ants as big as mice!*

*The moon may well desert us,
the paths may disappear,
the woods may whisper warnings,
"Go back, there's danger here!"
But Maya must be rescued,
the villain put to flight,
let's search with all our might!*

*Oh, search, search, search,
how could we be afraid
with a hat and him to hide behind
through every ghostly glade?
The only things to scare us
and make us start with fright
are glow-worms, lizards, snakes and snails
and slimy slugs with silver trails!*

But ...

*We've really made our minds up,
we know we shall succeed,
no fears can blunt our purpose,
no warnings make us heed!
As long as Maya's missing,
until she's safely freed
we'll search, we'll search, we'll search!*

Igor To the Dark Forest, quick march! Left, left, left right left! Left, left -

Peter Ow!

Igor Butterfeet! Come on, Peter - limp, limp, limp right limp! Limp, limp ...
 They exit.

Scene 5

*The Cottage. **Maya** and **Albert** as at the end of Scene 3, except that Albert is fast asleep.*

Maya Albert ... Albert!

Albert sleeps on. Maya struggles against her bonds, causing her chair to rock. Realising this might be a way to get free, she rocks backwards and forwards until she falls on her knees. She slips out of the rope. She tries the door. It is locked. She peeps through a crack in the window shutters.

It's getting dark! Albert, wake up!

Albert [Through gag] Uh? What ... Maya!

Maya [Untying him] There's no time to lose. It's getting dark already.

Albert Why, what are you going to do?

Maya I'm going to find out more about the Count's electricity, then get out of this place and see if there's still time to save President Igor.

Albert Hey? You can't get out of here! Anyway, what else can you find out? I've told you all I know.

Maya We'll have to break into the Count's den and see what we can find in there.

Albert Oh no, Maya, we can't do that! If he ever found out he'd kill us!

Maya What else can we do? We can't leave Igor to be tricked. We've got to call the Count's bluff. We've got to make some electricity ourselves.

Albert Make some?

Maya Yes.

Albert D'you think we could?

Maya Why not? We can try.

Albert Well ...

Maya Oh come on, Albert - help me, please!

Albert (After a moment's hesitation) All right!

Maya Good. First we're going to have to force that door open.

Albert Yes ... this should do it.

He takes the crow-bar from the fireplace.

It'll take both of us ...

Maya Right!

Albert Ready? One, two, three - heave!

They burst the den door open.

Both Done it!

- Maya Let's see what we can find ... *[disappearing into the den]* Ooh, it's full of extraordinary things!
- Albert Careful what you touch!
- Maya *[Off]* Somewhere there must be something written down. He can't have learnt it all by heart ... Albert, what's this?
- She brings a large book from the den.*
- Look, it's like a scrapbook. 'Electricity: Ways to make it flow'. This is what we're after! ... It's full of instructions. Listen. 'Take a tankful of water - cold water is best - add to it ten large spoonfuls of salt ...' It's like a cookery book!
- Albert What does that do?
- Maya 'This will make a simple cell.' Whatever could it mean by that?
- Albert A prison cell's the only kind of cell I know!
- Maya It can't be that. 'A simple cell'. Well, there's only one way to find out - make one! If the Count's made one everything he used must be here somewhere in this cottage. Is there a water tank anywhere, Albert?
- Albert Oh, yes - this. My old fish tank. He kept it in the den for a bit, then put it back in here. Said he didn't need it anymore.
- Maya Well, it's going to get used again now. What else do we need? 'A large copper plate'. Have we got that?
- Albert I think so. What else?
- Maya 'And a zinc plate, about the same size'.
- Albert Zinc? What's zinc? I don't think I've heard of that. *[To audience]* Does anyone know? ... Yes, of course, it's that white metal, isn't it? You know, they use it for roofing buildings sometimes. I'll have a look in the den. Anything else?
- Maya 'Insulated copper wire'.
- Albert Plenty of that.
- Maya And the last thing - 'a small bulb'.
- Albert We've got bulbs in all sizes ... See, here's a tiny one. That should do it. But is that all we need?
- Maya Seems to be.
- Albert That's ridiculous! We're not going to make electricity with just a couple of sheets of metal and salt and water! It's a joke - the Count's playing a trick on us.
- Maya I think you must be right ... Shall we try it, though? We've nothing to lose. *[To audience]* Shall we? ... Yes, let's!
- Albert All right. But we're being made fools of, if you ask me. Still, you get the water, I'll look for the metal plates. There's the tap.
- Maya Right!

Music. *Maya pulls the tank to under the tap.*

Ooh, this tap's stiff!

The water gushes out. An electric pump must be used here, so that the tank fills very quickly, and to aid emptying the tank between performances. Maya keeps an eye on the tank while

Albert searches out the other ingredients: the copper plate from the fireplace, the thin wire from the mantelpiece (complete with bulldog clips), the zinc plate from the den. He names them all clearly as he puts them on, or by, the table. He then attaches the two wires to the bulb.

Maya Right - that's enough.

She turns off the tap and tries to move the tank.

Albert, can you give me a hand?

Together they push the tank into the middle of the room.

There. Did you get everything?

Albert I think so, yes. Zinc plate, copper plate, wire and a bulb.

Maya Good. So how do we begin? ... 'Take a tankful of water, add to it ten large spoonfuls of salt'.

Albert Salt! I forgot!

He fetches the salt jar, and something else which he hides behind his back.

There you are.

Using a large wooden spoon, Maya adds the salt to the water.

One ... two... three ... four ... five ... six ... seven ... eight ... nine ... ten! Now give it a good stir. Ow, this water's freezing!

Albert Yes, straight off the mountains, out of the snow!

Maya Well, that should do. What next?

Albert Pepper?

Maya Albert!

Albert Sorry.

Maya Now ... 'Lower the plates into the tank, keeping them fairly close together'.

Albert does so. The upstage plate hangs a little higher than the other, so that both may be seen.

Albert Copper ... zinc ... right, that's done.

Maya 'Now make sure the room is dark.' That's to see the bulb light up, I suppose.

Albert If it does!

Maya 'Attach the wires from the bulb to the copper and zinc plates. The current will come out of the copper plate, flow round the circuit and go back into the zinc plate. To make that easy to remember, mark the way out with a plus sign, and the way back in with a minus sign.'

Albert I wondered what these were for. I thought they were just to help the Count with his sums! Hang on, let's clip them on the plates. Now which was the copper - the way out, or the way back in?

They ask the audience. In the event of total confusion, Maya refers back to the book. Albert clips the signs onto the plates.

Right. So now we just attach the wires, do we?

Maya That's what it says.

Albert Right. You hold the bulb then. Now ... one wire to the copper, and -

Maya Wait - off with the light first!

She switches off the main light.

Albert Fingers crossed for success, everyone! The other wire to the zinc ...

The bulb lights. Music.

Maya Albert! It's worked! It's worked!

Albert I'd never have believed it! All this time I've been helping him - and it's just salt and water and a couple of pieces of metal!

Maya Yes, and the Count wants to make out it's his own special power! The old fraud! But what is it, Albert? What's happening in there?

Albert I don't know. There's something funny going on between those plates, that's for sure.

Maya Yes! Ooh, I can't wait to show this to Igor. Whatever it is, it is electricity, isn't it? It proves the Count's not some kind of magician.

Albert Yes, but how can you show it to him? We can't carry this all the way through the forest.

Maya What? No, I suppose we can't. Oh, there must be another way of getting an electric current. Let's see what the book says ...

She switches on the main light.

Here, Page 2 ... 'How to make a dry cell, usually called a battery.'

Albert A battery! I've heard him mention them.

Maya This is easier to move about than the simple cell, but like the simple cell it gives the electricity only a very small push to send it on its journey round the circuit; a push of about one [pronouncing as 'vault'] volt.

Albert No, volt - one volt, Maya. He's told me about the volt. It's about the smallest amount of electricity you can use. That bulb's using over a hundred volts.

Maya Oh ... Oh, but look, it says 'you can join dry cells together, to make batteries with much bigger pushes'! D'you think we could do that?

Albert What does it need?

Maya Let's see ... 'A dry cell. You can make this as big or as small as you like'. Let's make a big one to start with, shall we?

Albert Yes, if we can.

Maya We'll need ... 'a carbon rod'. What would that be?

Albert What's carbon? Does anyone know? ... Yes, [that's right/I know] - it's like charcoal, isn't it? You know, the stuff you draw black lines with. I haven't seen anything like that in here. I'll have a look in the den. What else?

Maya 'A large zinc case'.

Albert Well, we can make one from this sheet of it if we have to.

Maya 'And two special chemicals: a black powder, which is a mixture of carbon and ... mang-a-nese diox-ide ... and a greyish-white paste of am-mo-nium chl-oride'. Ugh! I've never come across those before. D'you think he's got them?

Albert I'll see what I can find. Anything else?

Maya 'A muslin bag'. That's all.

Albert Muslin bag. Right.

He disappears into the den. Maya clears the water tank out of the way.

[Off] Hey, it's all here! Everything we want - all together under my old bed!

[Appearing] I'll pass them out ... zinc case ... jars of chemicals ... carbon rod ... and this must be the muslin bag.



Maya and Albert make a huge dry cell

Maya Good. Let's see how we do it ... 'Take the carbon rod and place it in the muslin bag ...'

Albert There ...

Maya 'Now surround the rod with the black powder'. That's the stuff, isn't it?

Albert Yes. Look, I'll hold the bag open, you pour ...

Maya Done. 'Now place the bag inside the zinc case and pack the ammonium chloride paste round it.' Let's put some of the paste in first ... there ... Now put the bag in ...

Albert Right.

Maya And I'll fill in round it ... Ugh! You know what this reminds me of?

Albert Cold porridge.

Maya Exactly! ... Right, that's all the paste.

Rod and bag are now supported by the paste with the rod showing above the top of the case.

Now ... 'The current will come out of the carbon rod, flow round the circuit and back into the zinc case' ... so that's what? - The plus sign on the carbon rod? ... Yes ... And the minus sign on the zinc case. Good. So, just attach the wires from the bulb ...

Albert Fingers crossed! This one to the zinc case - oh, light off!

Maya switches off the main light.

This one to the zinc case ... and this one to the carbon rod.

The bulb lights. Music.

Maya It works! We've done it, Albert!

Albert Yippee!

Maya Just think, we've only got to make a lot of little cells like this, link them together, and we'll have a really strong battery to show to Igor!

She switches the main light back on.

Albert Maya, you're forgetting one thing.

Maya What's that?

Albert We can't get out of here.

Maya What? Oh, there must be a way! Can't we force this door, like we did the other one?

Albert It's far too solid. And he put that lock on 'specially. I've tried everything, honestly. Everything except crawling through the drain and climbing up the chimney!

Maya The chimney, of course!

Albert What? You'll never do that, it's too narrow!

Maya It may not be. Come on, help me up.

Albert You'll get stuck.

Maya I won't! Come on!

Albert gives her a leg up and she disappears from sight up the chimney.

Albert How are you doing? ... Maya? ... Are you stuck?

Maya [Off] No! ... No, I can do it!

She drops back into the room, covered in soot.

I can do it - I can get out!

Albert Really?

Maya Yes! It's too narrow for you, so I'll have to get to Igor on my own. But once he knows the Count's a fraud, we can come back here and get you out. Is that all right?

Albert If you think you can manage by yourself ... ?

Maya I'm sure I can. Oh, Albert, we're going to win. We're going to beat him, I know we are!

*[Singing] Though it may be
a bit of a mystery
electricity we've found we can command!
With this zinc and carbon we
can make a battery
which will show the world a way we know
to make a current flow ...*

*Around a circuit.
a circular circuit,
round a path complete and quite without a gap!
Currents like to be conducted
round a route so well constructed
that there's never a stop, never a flap,
never a moment's pause in fact
in the circuit!
The circular circuit,
the path that doesn't stop or fizzle out,
for as long as it's unbroken
the current's free to flow
through the wire inside the bulb
to make it brightly glow!*

*That's the circuit,
the circular circuit,
that's the circuit,
the circular circuit,
the circular, circular, circular, circular
CIRCUIT!*

Maya Right, Albert - let's make lots of small dry cells as fast as we can!

Albert Right, Maya!

Maya See you all later - in the forest!

Both Bye!

Music. They return to work as the lights fade.

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 1

*A path through the Dark Forest. A cable runs along it. It is night. **Music.***

*Enter **Count**, to spotlight.*

Count Excellent! Night once again, and news from the Palace that Igor has mysteriously disappeared into the forest with a young peasant boy. In the Great Clearing I shall be ready for him. Electric floodlights are hidden high in the trees all around. At the flick of a switch Igoria will be mine!

*From behind the audience, the sound of **Igor** and **Peter** singing 'Search!'.*

 He approaches! To our meeting in the Clearing!

Exit Count. Enter Igor and Peter. They stop to view the route ahead.

Igor This is tough going for me, Peter. Must be out of condition. Are we near the Clearing yet?

Peter It can't be far.

Igor Thank goodness for that. My old legs'll give out shortly. I say, Peter ...

Peter Yes?

Igor This forest has turned very queer all of a sudden. Look, these trees, they're all growing in rows - like some kind of plantation. I didn't know there were any plantations in the Dark Forest. Did you?

Peter N-no, I didn't.

Igor How thick's this tree here?

He takes a ruler out of his pocket and measures a head.

 Nineteen centimetres. You could make a good floorboard out of this one. Ah well, press on. Do you recognise the path?

Peter I ... I think so. See, it meets another one going across, over there.

Igor So it does. Well done, my boy. Know it like the back of your hand, I daresay?

Peter reaches the path.

Peter Well, no ... not really.

Igor Don't be modest. I know you forest-bred chaps. Find your way with your eyes shut, mile after mile.

He joins Peter on the path.

 Right, which way do we go? That way? Or that way?

Peter I ... I don't know.

Igor What?

Peter I'm lost. We've walked round in circles so many times I don't know which way we're facing anymore!

Igor But ... ! Good heavens, what shall we do? If we take the wrong path we could walk on for hours, and just get further and further away from the Clearing. Surely you can remember something, Peter? *[Scanning the audience]* Don't you recognise any of those trees? What about that one there - with those funny (yellow/red/blue) branches?

Peter No. No, it's no help. All I know is we've got to go south or south-west, more than north or north-east.



Philip Davis as Peter & Edward Phillips as Igor

Igor What? Oh, then that's easy! A job for the compass. Turn round, will you, while I fish it out ... that's it. Good job we didn't forget this. You know, the Chief Astronomer will give me such a ticking-off if he finds I've taken it. But I've never liked those modern, pocket-sized versions. Right, let's take a bearing and see what's what. I'll put it on the ground, make sure it's steady ... Oh! *[Picking up the cable]* Whatever's this?

Peter That's it! That's the plastic thing - the tube!

Igor *[Dropping it]* What? I say, it stretches as far as the eye can see.

Tentatively, he picks it up again.

Are you sure it's a tube?

Peter That's what Maya said.

Igor Yes, you know, she may be right. Not completely solid, but full of something quite hard. How very odd. Well, we've got to crack on, so whatever it is I'm

going to use it to balance up the compass. Ground slopes a bit here, it's just the job. There we are ... One large compass needle, turning freely and pointing North! See, Peter, over there - straight at that tree with the (blue tie/yellow shirt). In fact, just so's we get this exactly right, I think I might mark that tree with a large letter N. Got the pot of paint handy ...

He strides off the stage to mark the 'tree'. At the last moment, the compass needle swings through 90 degrees.

Peter Help! Look!

Igor What's the matter?

Peter The needle - it's moved!

Igor Can't have!

Peter It has. It's pointing over there now. Look!

Igor So it is. Well, I probably hadn't balanced the thing up properly. Nothing to worry about, Peter. Look, now it's pointing towards that tree with the (blue sweater/red beard). You go and mark north on that. A large letter N. There's the brush. We'll soon have this one sorted out.

Before Peter can mark the 'tree' the needle swings back.

Wait! I can't believe it, it's moved back!

Peter It's that tube, that's what it is - putting spells on us!

Igor Nonsense, Peter. It's only something magnetic that will make a compass needle move about, isn't it? Whoever heard of a magnetic tube?

Peter Well ...

Igor You haven't got a magnet in your pocket, have you?

Peter No!

Igor Well ... perhaps it is the tube. Perhaps the tube is magnetic in some way. You know, Peter, we've some very serious questions to ask someone. The sooner we get to that Clearing the better. Let's move the compass away from the tube and get a reading we can rely on. Go on - pick it up.

Peter Oh ... right ...

Igor That's it. Now hold it steady. Good. So North is ... over there. *[To the needle, giving it a knock]* Are you sure? You are - good. So that makes that way about North-East, and that way about South-West. And we want to go ... ?

Peter South and West rather than North and East.

Igor Yes. So that way it is, Peter - following the tube!

Peter Y-Yes.

Igor Splendid! After you, then.

Peter No, no, after you!

Igor Oh, very well! *[Loudly]* Onward! - Ssshhh! Onward to the Clearing!

Music. *Exeunt in step.*

A brief lapse of time.

Enter **Maya**. She carries two large, heavy bags.

Maya I've been walking for hours! It seems twice as far as it did going the other way this morning. Still, I mustn't stop. If Igor's on his way to the Clearing I must get to him first - show him what Albert and I have made ...

From a bag she takes a crudely made battery and, connected to it, a small bulb mounted on a block of wood. The wires are separate so that the circuit is obvious.

See, a battery made of eight dry cells ... and an electric light ... there! And I've brought all the bulbs and wires we could find. That should put paid to the Count's plot. So come on, Maya, keep going! I must be close to the Clearing now ...

Music. She follows the cable off.

Fade.

Scene 2

*The Great Clearing, which is empty. Enter **Igor** and **Peter**, eyes glued to the cable. Peter stops.*

Peter Psst!

Igor What?

Peter This is it - the Clearing!

Igor What? Oh! Oh, I see. Empty. Not a thing in sight. And the tube just seems to run off into the trees again. You're sure this is it?

Peter Positive. The flashing thing stood right here, in the middle.

Igor Well, it's flashed off into thin air now. Which way did your sister go - when she followed the tube?

*Enter, behind them, the **Count**, switch-box in hand.*

Peter I didn't see. I went straight off to find you.

Igor Oh dear, this is difficult. I suppose there's nothing for it but to have a good shout for her. You have a good bellow that way, and I'll have one this ...

They separate, to shout off either side and are drawing breath when the Count throws a switch. The Clearing is flooded in bright, white light.

Count Welcome, Mr President!

Igor/Peter Agh!

Igor *[Shading his eyes]* What the ... ! I ... ! Good heavens, what's happening?

Count See our Dark Forest brilliant with light, brighter at midnight than in the noonday sun!

Igor Do you see what I see, Peter? Is it candles? Thousands and thousands of candles? Or lanterns like this one?

Peter shakes his head.

Then what is it? Who are you? ...

The Count removes his shades.

Good heavens! You're ... you're Grabolovsky - Count Grabolovsky! We thought you were dead. Lost in those terrible mountains years ago.

Count It seems you were mistaken. As you can see I am very much alive.

Igor Yes ... s-s-so I see. Now, look here, what is it you're -

Count Tonight, Igor, here in the Dark Forest, you have a choice. On it depends the whole future of Igoria.

Igor Oh ... ?

Count I have a power no earthly power can equal. A power that could bring light like this into every corner of our country - into our homes, our streets, our schools and factories. A power that could drive our machines, and carry our voices over thousands of miles!

Igor Good heavens!

Count A power that will make a new world of Igoria - if ...

Igor If what?

Count This power is mine alone. Only I can produce it, only I can control it. For all our people to enjoy it, you must first resign your authority to me.

Igor Oh! I see. Well, yes, of course I must put the country first, and this power does seem very, very remarkable ... yes, an enormous boon ... but ... er, may I ask, what would happen if I refused?

Count Igoria will burn -

He throws another switch and light becomes a burning red.

- in flames fiercer than a forest fire!

Igor What? Stop! Stop!

The Count switches the light back to white.

Count The choice is yours, Igor! A fantastic new power for everyone to enjoy, or every town and village reduced to ashes in my hands!

Igor I ... ! Good heavens, Peter, this man is a monster. Whatever do I do? *[To Count]* How can I be sure you really can control this power like you say?

Count Night, return to the Dark Forest, now!

Igor Agh!

Count Day, return to the Dark Forest, now!

Igor Fantastic! Quite fantastic! You sure I'm not dreaming, Peter? ... Then I have no choice, have I? Igoria must come first. - Very well, Count, on one condition - that there'll be no more talk of burning - ?

The Count makes a conciliatory gesture.

- Then I resign. I resign as President of Igoria.

Count Excellent, excellent! I shall be sworn in as President at noon tomorrow.

Igor What, tomorrow? No, no, no, these things take -

Count There's no time to waste. Or to argue! Tomorrow at noon! So come, Igor - with me to the Palace!

*[Singing] Spread this message throughout the land,
My power is come with this demand!
Igor has bowed to my command,
Grabolovsky's hour is at hand!*

He switches off the floodlights and hustles Igor off, leaving Peter alone.

Peter What shall I do? *[Calling] Maya! ... Maya!*

There is no response. He sits on the ground and after a few moments falls asleep.

Music. *Enter Maya.*

Maya *[Shaking him awake] Peter?*

Peter Maya! Wherever've you been?

Maya That's a long story. What are you doing here?

Peter I came here with President Igor.

Maya What - he's been here himself?

Peter Yes. He -

Maya Has the Count been here, too? Count Grabolovsky?

Peter Yes. He made the whole forest light up - by magic!

Maya Oh no!

Peter It was like the sun was shining at midnight! And then it was all like flames - like a great blazing fire!

Maya Oh, Peter, it's wasn't magic. It was a trick. I've been to the Count's hideout and found out how it's done.

Peter What?

Maya Oh, why couldn't I have got here in time? We'd so nearly outwitted him. Where are they now? What happened?

Peter They're on their way to the Palace. The Count's going to be made President at noon!

Maya He can't! He mustn't! We must follow them, Peter.

Peter But -

Maya Come on! I'll tell you all about it on the way. Quickly!

Music. *Exeunt.*

Fade.

Scene 3

The street outside the Palace Prison. A high wall with a high, barred window.

*Enter a **Palace Guard**, who reads a proclamation. As he does so, **Igor's** weebegone face appears at the window.*

Guard 'Citizens of Igoria, 'ear this! President Igor 'as, for the good of 'is country, resigned 'is position to the great magician of light, Count Grabolovsky. The

Count's swearin' in will take place at noon today in the Great 'all of the Presidential Palace. It is therefore decreed ...

Enter, behind him, Maya and Peter.

First, that all citizens shall attend the ceremony, to 'umble themselves before their new President and to see demonstrated 'is fantastic powers. Second, that from this day forth the name, 'President Igor', shall never again be spoken, neither in public, nor in private!

Igor's face disappears from view.

Peter What?

Maya Ssshhh!

Guard The penalty for failing to obey this decree will be lifelong imprisonment in the Dark Forest. Long live President Grabolovsky!

Maya Excuse me, sir ...

Peter Maya - !

Guard Yes, young lady? What can I do for you?

Maya We're looking for President ... for the man who used to be President.

Guard Oh yes? And what would a couple of youngsters like you be wanting with 'im?

Maya Er ... we want to return something of his ... that we found in the forest.

Guard Do you? Well, I should forget all about it if I were you. Or you might end up where 'e is. And you wouldn't fancy that now, would you?

Peter Why - where is he?

Guard In there, sonny - the Palace Prison!

Peter In prison! President Igor!

Maya Peter!

Guard I din't 'ear that, young man! But next time I might. All right? Now 'op it!

Maya and Peter retreat. The Guard begins a slow exit, repeating the proclamation ...

'Citizens of Igoria, 'ear this! President Igor 'as, for the good of 'is country, resigned 'is position to the great magician of light, Count Grabolovsky ...'

Maya Go on, Peter - you call him. He knows your voice.

Peter Watch for that Guard, won't you?

Maya Of course I will. Now go on - hurry!

Peter Igor! Igor! It's Peter! Are you there?

Igor looks warily out of the window.

Igor Good heavens, Peter, how on earth did you know where I was?

Peter That Guard said. The one reading the proclamation.

Igor I see. Bad do, this, isn't it? The Count clapping me in prison? D'you know, he's behaving like some tinpot dictator. He's just marched in, scared eveyone stiff, shining that extraordinary light thing he carries in everyone's eyes, and taken over. To put the tin lid on it, he's going to make me swear him in! He's turned

out to be a terrifically unpleasant fellow.

Peter He is - and he's a cheat, as well!

Igor What?

Peter It's true. Maya's discovered his secrets.

Igor Maya? You mean she's turned up?

Peter She's here! She got to the Clearing just after you left.

Igor Very pleased to meet, you Maya. Honoured to make your acquaintance!

Maya Thank you.

Igor But what's all this about the Count?

Peter He's a cheat - a fraud! Maya can prove it. She's been to his hideout in the forest.

Igor Good heavens!

Peter It's not his own power at all. Go on, Maya, tell him.

Maya He's just learnt how to make and how to use electricity.

Igor Electricity? You mean, the stuff that makes the lightning flash?

Maya Yes.

Igor But ... ! That can't be true!

Maya It is! In the outside world everyone uses it. They've used it for years. For lighting, for working machines, all sorts of things.

Igor The outside world? What d'you mean? How d'you know?

Peter The Count's been out of Igoria!

Igor Over the mountains?

Maya Yes. He found a way years ago - and kept it all to himself.

Peter Maya says if he gets to be President he's still going to keep it to himself. Everything he knows about electricity as well.

Igor The scoundrel! He said ... ! But, wait a minute, Maya, do you really mean to say that you and I and everyone else could use electricity?

Maya Yes. In our homes, our schools, everywhere.

Igor And you mean, it's safe? It doesn't set the world on fire?

Maya Not if it's used properly, no. Look, I'll show you.

Igor You've got some there?

Maya Yes, this is called an 'electric battery'. It's a kind of electrical power store. Made up of little things we call 'cells', all connected up. They produce one volt of electricity each. Well, a bit more than one volt, actually - these eight cells produce about twelve volts altogether. Enough to work a light like this ... look!

Igor That's extraordinary.

Peter It's lights like that one he must have used in the forest - white ones and red ones. Only hundreds of times bigger!

Igor I see. But, Maya, are you sure you know what you're doing?

Maya Yes, I made this battery myself, with a man called Albert who's been imprisoned by the Count in the forest. We found the Count's book of instructions and this is one of the things it told us how to do. They're just little zinc cases with a carbon rod and chemicals inside that sort of - get up to something in there and produce the electric current. It flows along this wire here, into this bulb, through a tiny little wiggly wire inside that gets all hot and bothered and makes the light, then it flows on along this wire and back into the cells.

Igor I see ... But what on earth is it, Maya? I mean, what is one of these electric currents? What's happening in that wire?

Maya I don't know that. The Count never told Albert and it didn't say in the book.

Igor Didn't it really? Well, that makes it all the more fascinating, doesn't it? Oh, if only I wasn't trapped in a wretched cell myself, I could make a special study of it. I mean, it's just what Igoria needs - a new source of power like this. Oh, what a fool I've been! That villain! In a few hours time he'll be President!

Peter Can't we just tell everyone what a cheat he is?

Maya We'd never get away with it, Peter. We'd be in prison ourselves before we knew it. No, somehow we've got to beat him at his own game. I've brought every bulb and every bit of wire I could find from the hideout, so we might just be able to do it. Is there any way we can get into the Great Hall without being seen?

Igor Oo, that's not easy. He's been up to something in there already - he's sure to have locked the door. But let me think ... Yes, of course! There's another door - a secret one you get to through an underground passage. He won't know about that yet. Look, cross the street, right at the end, and go down the first little alley on your right. At the end of that, on your left, are some stone steps with a little wooden flap at the bottom. That's the entrance. You'll come up right on the stage - a little door in the panelling.

Maya Right. Come on, Peter! See you at the ceremony!

Exeunt Maya and Peter.

Igor Righty-ho! ... Hey, wait! You haven't told me what you're going to do!

Music. *Igor's perplexed face disappears from the window.*

A brief lapse of time. A clock strikes eleven.

*Enter **Albert**, almost hidden under a huge, tatty overcoat and a great hat. He is trying to find his way with the help of a large plan. He looks about anxiously, then continues. He sees something off, looks round desperately for cover, then slumps down by the wall like a beggar - the plan hidden behind him, the hat over his eyes. Enter the **Count**. He strides past Albert, then stops. He turns, suspicious. Albert stretches out a shaking hand, as if for alms. The Count shrugs contemptuously and exits. Albert looks out from underneath his hat, mouth a 'phew!', then gets up and exits.*

Fade.

Scene 4

*The stage of the Great Hall. A large chair. An imposing door. A small door, disguised in the panelling, stands open. Above are rigged two circuits of 'pygmy' light bulbs. **Maya** and **Peter** are completing one of the circuits, fitting the last few bulbs into their holders.*

The circuits are dead. Dim light is provided by two candles on tall, ornate stands.

Peter Are these the last?

Maya The last bulbs, yes. But we've still got to connect the circuit up to the battery. How long d'you think we've got left?

Peter Ten minutes, maybe. It seems ages since that clock struck eleven.

Maya Yes ... Still, that's all mine in. What about yours?

Peter Yes ... there ... that's it.

Maya Good. Let's hope they all work! Now, where's that battery?

A crash in the secret passage.

Albert *[Off]* Ow!

Peter What?

Maya A guard! Quick - hide!

*They dodge out of sight. **Albert** peers round the door. He tiptoes warily into the hall, rubbing his head. He is sizing up the circuits, when Maya sees him.*

Albert!

Albert Maya!

Maya How on earth did you get here?

Albert I found this old plan of the Palace in one of the Count's bags. It's got every staircase and passage in the place.

Maya But how did you get out of the cottage?

Albert Through the door! Look - spare key. Hidden under the floor in the den. I thought it might be worth a search.

Maya Well done!

Albert It was late by then, so I came straight here. Then I heard what's happening.

Maya Yes, everything went wrong in the forest. Oh, this is my brother, Peter. Peter, this is Albert.

Albert Hello, Peter.

Peter Hello.

Albert What have you been doing?

Maya We though we'd beat the Count at his own game. Look, he's fixed up a circuit all round there.

Albert Yes, that's the one I worked out for him.

Maya Well, we've put one of our own over here - look. With different coloured bulbs.

Albert That was quick work!

Maya Yes! Now, when the ceremony starts we're going to challenge the Count to give Igor one chance to show that he can use this mysterious power as well.

Albert Yes, that should do it.

Peter We hope so!

Albert Is everything ready?

Maya Almost. We've just got to join the circuit up to the battery.

The clock begins to strike twelve.

Peter Twelve o'clock!

Maya What? What are we going to do?

Albert Here - give me the battery. I'll connect it up in the passage. Whatever you do, don't let the ceremony go through. Slow it down any way you can!

Maya Yes ...

Albert As soon as it's ready I'll come back and challenge the Count myself.

Maya Right! Hurry!

Albert I will!

He gathers up the battery, two crocodile clips from Maya's bag and the two ends of the circuit and disappears into the secret passage. Maya shuts the door behind him. She and Peter leap into hiding.

*Fanfare. Enter the **Count**, splendidly dressed. In his hand he has a trailing switch-box. **Igor**, looking very anxious, follows him with a scroll and a ceremonial chain of office.*

Count Lights!

He flicks a switch and his blue, green and white circuit lights the stage.

*[Singing] Citizens of Igoria
welcome to this celebration!
This hour of triumph
you have wisely given me
in return for which
my great and magical power
I'll give this land
which then like this palace will glow
with light brighter than the noonday sun
every hour of my reign
for you, my people, to admire and wonder at!*

Maya *[To audience]* What does he think he is - a king?

Count And now let the ceremony begin!

Igor casts an anxious look around.

Igor Raise your right hand ... Do you, Count Leonid - it is Leonid, isn't it, or have I made a mistake there - ?

Count Leonid it is.

Igor Yes, of course. I'm sorry. I'll start again ... Raise your right hand ... Do you, Count Leonid Grabolovsly, solemnly swear to cherish the people of this land, to

abide by its laws, and to use your unique and mysterious power for the good of all?

Count I do.

Maya [*Aside*] Oh, come on, Albert - hurry!

Igor Then be seated and I will place the Presidential chain of office around your neck.

The Count sits. Igor glances about for some sign of Maya and Peter.

Maya Pssst!

Igor Maya!

Maya Slow down!

Igor Eh?

Maya Slow the ceremony down!

Count Is anything the matter?

Igor What? ... No! No, nothing at all.

Count Then get on with it!

Igor Yes, of course ... If I can just remember how to undo this thing ... bit of a knack to it, you know ... ah, there we are ... Right. Then here, Count Leonid Grabolovsky, in the name of all the people of Igoria - and in the name of all past Presidents who have held this solemn office - President Peter Kronic, President Ivan Grumble, President Half Witty, President Villy Von Vroom, President Lef de Foot, President -

Count You're just making those up!

Igor I most certainly am not!

Count How many Presidents have there been?

Igor You'll be the hundred and twenty-seventh.

Count What?

Igor We're the oldest republic in the world.

Count I don't care! You're not bumbling your way through all of them. Get to the important bit - quick!

Igor Oh, very well.

Maya [*Aside*] Albert - where is he?

Enter Albert at the audience rear, hat low over head.

Igor Then in the name of all the people and all the one hundred and twenty-six past Presidents of Igoria, I invest you, President Leonid Grab -

Albert Stop!

Count What? Who's that?

Albert Never mind who I am, Count. I challenge you to give President Igor one chance to prove that he too can command your mysterious power!

Count What? Don't be ridiculous! Get on with the ceremony!

Albert No, Count. We all challenge you - don't we? Don't we?

All Yes!

Count Very well. One chance it is then. Go on, Igor - make this hall blaze with light!

He sits. Maya steps forward, switch-box in hand.

Maya Peter!

Peter steps forward, deftly snatching the Count's switch-box from him.

Count You!

Maya Break the Count's circuit, please.

Peter Yes, Maya.

He switches off the Count's circuit.

Count How the devil ... ?

Maya Quiet, please, Count.

She hands Igor her switch-box.

Now, Mr President, complete your own electric circuit!

Igor What?

Maya [Whispering] Pull the switch.

Igor Oh, righty-ho ... Er, one , two, three ...

May/Pet/Alb Lights!

Igor throws the switch and a circuit of red, yellow and white bulbs lights up. Peter leads a great cheer. Albert joins them on the stage.

Count Curse you, you interfering little devils! I'll tear you apart, Albert!

Igor steps in between them.

Igor That's enough, Count! The game's up. As you can see, thanks to Maya and Peter and Albert, I've learnt a little about 'electricity' myself. You're a villain, a fraud and a liar, Count, and this country wouldn't have you for President for all the tea in China. Would it?

All No!

Count A plague on the whole lot of you!

Igor I hope we'll escape that, Count. But what are we going to do with you?

Peter Put him in prison. Like he did with you.

Igor Well, I must say, that seems pretty fair. What was that threat of yours - 'lifelong imprisonment in the Dark Forest'? Any reason you can think of why you don't deserve that?

Count I ...

Igor Well?

Maya May I ...?

Igor Yes, Maya?

She whispers in his ear.

What? ... Oh, I see ... Yes, yes, you're quite right, of course ... Well, Count, there may yet be a way out for you. Maya reminds me that there is one very important thing about electricity that we've yet to understand. She suggests that if you can give us the answer we need you could be free to go. What d'you say - is that a bargain?

Count Why ... yes, yes, of course!

Igor Right, Maya - fire away!

Maya It's just this, Count: what is it?

Count What's what?

Maya What is electricity?

Count It's ... it's what's making all those bulbs light up, isn't it? Heating all the little wires inside.

Maya We know that! We know what it does. And we know how to make it flow. But we can't hear it. We can't smell it. And it seems to flow invisibly along solid metal wires. So what is it?

Pause.

Igor Come on, Count. What's it to be - an answer, or bread and water in the Dark Forest?

Count I ... I don't know.

Igor Pardon?

Count I don't know what it is! I don't know if anyone does, absolutely for sure.

Albert What?

Igor You mean ... you mean it really is a mystery after all? Even on the other side of the mountains?

Count Yes, I think so.

Igor Good heavens!

Count *[Fumbling in a pocket]* I ... I wrote down a word somewhere, a sort of clue to what it is ... here.

He hands Igor a crumpled scrap of paper.

Igor 'Elect Ron'. Who's Ron?

Count No - 'electron'. Electrons - that's what they think it is. They think electrons - tiny, tiny things - sort of jump about from atom to atom inside the wire and make the electric current. But they're far too small to see, even through a microscope.

Igor I'm not much the wiser, Maya, are you?

Maya No.

Igor Isn't it fascinating, though? A real scientific mystery. You know, I'd rather like to look into this electron business myself. Wouldn't you, Peter?

Peter Well ...

Maya What about the Count?

Igor You mean he hasn't really answered your question? No ... However, I might still have a mind to overlook his nasty little plot ...

Peter What?

Igor On one - no, on two conditions. First, Count, that you show us that secret path of yours over the mountains, and second, that you work as hard for all of us as you made Albert work for you. Because I'm going to set up an Igorian laboratory. A great Igorian investigation into the mystery of electricity. And we four, led by Albert and Maya here, are going to be its chief boffins! What d'you, say, eh?

May/Alb/Pet Oh, yes!

Igor Will you accept Grabolovsky here as our first assistant?

Maya Well ... he's got a lot to tell us, hasn't he, Albert? About other ways of making electricity - and other uses for it?

Albert Yes.

Peter I want to ask him something. Why electricity works like a magnet. That tube-thing - the wire. It made our compass needle swing about in the forest.

Maya Did it?

Igor It most certainly did, Maya. Quite right, Peter, I'd forgotten that. Well, will you have him?

May/Alb/Pet Yes, we will!

Igor Is that a bargain, Count?

Count Yes, that's a bargain.

Igor Good. So we're all agreed! I think we'd better get on with it at once, don't you?

All Yes!

Igor Splendid!

Music. *They all sing:*

*If there can be
a genuine mystery
electricity we must investigate!
To seek to understand
this power we now command
must be our purpose now we know
we've found a way to make it flow ...*

*Around a circuit.
a circular circuit,
round a path complete and quite without a gap!
For it likes to be conducted
round a route so well constructed
that there's never a stop, never a flap,
never a moment's pause in fact
in the circuit!
The circular circuit,
the path that doesn't stop or fizzle out,*

*for as long as it's unbroken
the current's free to flow
through the wire inside the bulb
to make it brightly glow!*

*The scientists say,
'Oh yes, it's a mystery,
electricity we really can't explain!
But our theory seems to be
electrons are the key,
that they hop from atom to atom
like invisible jumping beans ...'*

*Around a circuit
etc*

*That's the circuit,
the circular circuit,
that's the circuit,
the circular circuit,
the circular, circular, circular, circular
CIRCUIT!*

All

Goodbye! Goodbye! Goodbye!

The End