

The French Lieutenant's Woman

by Mark Healy
adapted from the novel by John Fowles

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The following text must be printed in any programme -

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Pennsylvania*

*Michael D Mitchell, Artistic Director
Deidre W. Simmons, Director of Theatre Advancement
Rod McCullough, Managing Director*

The Company

This adaptation has been written for an ensemble company of nine actors (five female and four male) who may share the speaking parts as follows: –

Sarah Woodruff

Ernestina Freeman – Emma – American Girl

Mary – Girl – Detective 2

Mrs Poulteney – Mrs Endicott

Mrs Tranter – Ma Terpsichore – American Woman

The Writer– Dr Grogan

Charles Smithson

Sam Farrow – Tom – Detective 3

Nathanial Montague – Mr Forsythe – Detective 1

The company also plays various ensemble roles.

The Writer is the creator of the peace. He is telling his story. How much he controls it and his characters varies throughout. He cannot be seen by the characters (except where stated) and so can move freely through the action observing and working his story as it unfolds.

In effect the setting of the play is the inside of The Writer's head – his imaginative, creative mind. The story he creates plays out in various locations - Lyme Regis, Exeter and London in the years 1867 to 1869. The play has been written with a multi-locational set design in mind so that the action may crossover between scenes with minimal use of blackouts or set changes. Also simultaneous action may be shown.

Prologue

Before the houselights go down, as the audience settles...

Sound of an orchestra warming up, this develops into a chaotic distorted soundscape that includes modern city noises, crowds, cars, a train, etc.

The houselights begin to fade to black as the volume increases. The sounds become more "nineteenth century". We hear snatches of an old vaudeville tune, the intermittent sound of the warning bell of a buoy, waves, seagulls. There is laughter, voices crying out, the puffing of a steam engine, a church bell, a baby crying, the machinery of a factory, etc.

Disconnected figures begin to appear in the shadows. We hear various lines from them or they play out some physical characteristic we will recognise later when we meet them properly. For the moment they are simply kaleidoscopic images –

Ernestina looks at herself in the mirror – "Eighty-eight days, I cannot bear the thought."

Mrs Poulteney sits with Mrs Fairley standing behind her - "You will do nothing of the sort, that is blasphemy."

Grogan stands looking out - "We make our destinies by the gods we choose."

Nat drinks and whoops at girls out front - "We're all damned lucky fellows."

Sam runs across - "There's nothing here! Let's turn back now! It's getting too dark!"

Mary walks through - "'Ave yer got a bag of soot?"

Mrs Tranter sits sewing - "Its all gossip."

The Girl walks the streets or dances.

The cloaked figure of a woman, Sarah Woodruff, appears silhouetted with her back to us.

The sound continues to build.

Ernestina - "Did you find anything among the rocks today?"

Nat - "I think we'll have champers all round."

Mary - "Paris? I would love Paris!"

Sam - "I'm a Derby Duck, sir! A bloomin' Derby Duck!"

Mrs Tranter - "He was nothing but a heartless deceiver."

Mrs Poulteney - "I permit no one in my employ to go or be seen near that place."

Ernestina - "The fishermen have a gross name for her."

*Climax - the sound of a steam train's whistle.
The Writer, 40s - 50s, dressed in modern clothes, enters.*

Writer STOP!

Silence. The characters are all still.

I don't know how to begin...

He moves over to his "corner" – a place where he shall go to often throughout the play.

There he has papers, pens, books, a decanter and glasses. He surveys his papers and the figures around him. He addresses the audience.

It's all a mess... My mind, you see, is a kaleidoscope... of images... characters... stories. They come and go like flotsam and jetsam and somehow I'm supposed to make sense of it all...

He shuffles through some papers.

Sometimes these ghosts arrive and stay for a day or a week. Sometimes they refuse to come into focus, they stay just out of reach. But then, every once in awhile, there are those that come uninvited and just won't go away... I ignore them, to test them, to find out if they really are a door into another world. I work on something else... But this one –

He turns and sees the characters.

No... Not them –

He waves away all of them but Sarah and they exit.

... Her... She is different; stubborn, bloody-minded... She haunts me. She refuses to talk. She won't even turn around. She just stands there, sphinx-like... with her back to me... staring out. At what?

He signals and the seascape appears behind her.

At the sea....

I know so little about her... And yet, everything else seems to drown in her shadow.

And so if I am to unravel this enigma I need a young protagonist – meet my surrogate, Mr Charles Smithson.

The Writer gestures and Charles Smithson enters

The Writer moves round him, studying him.

Now this man I do know. Tall, intelligent, handsome – forgive me, narcissism is an essential vice in a writer.

So I start with these two... And some fishermen and women...

The ensemble enters dressed as the people of lime they take up positions.

...In the small coastal town of Lyme in Dorset... In spring, 1867... And it's windy...

Sound of wind.

...Very windy...

Sound of wind and waves increases.

Yes, yes, like that! Thomas Hardy would be proud....

He takes up a position at his corner.

Charles.

Lights change – the action starts up.

A misty and blustery early spring morning in the small fishing port of Lyme Regis, 1867. Men and women are working - calling to each other, mending nets, preparing boats, gutting fish.

Sounds of seagulls, waves and the buoy bell again.

The cloaked woman stands at the end of the Cobb, an ancient sea rampart, oblivious to those around her who are almost as oblivious to her. She looks out to sea with her back to us – we do not see her face. Charles moves towards the woman. He is obviously concerned for her safety...

Charles (calling) Madam! ...Madam!

The woman does not seem to hear him.

It is very dangerous here! Please step back from the edge!

The woman does not move.

My good woman! I can't see you here without being alarmed for your safety. A stronger squall and perhaps –

She turns. This is Sarah Woodruff.

All action stops – Charles transfixed by her look. The solitary distant boy Bell.

Forgive me, I thought...

Writer (to himself) Yes...

Charles is transfixed by her look.

(to the audience) That is how my story begins.

(calling out to his characters) Mrs Poulteney! Kindly continue, please!

Lights cross to -

Act One

Scene 1 - "My conscience is troubled..."

Marlborough House

Mrs Poulteney, Mrs Fairley and Mr Forsythe

Mrs Poulteney My conscience is troubled, Reverend. I am old... I believe I'm not long for this world. I have, for some time now, been contemplating my account with Heaven.

Mr Forsythe Madam, your feet are on the rock. The Creator is all-seeing and all-wise. It is not for us to doubt His mercy – or His justice.

Mrs Poulteney But supposing he should ask me if my conscience is clear?

Mr Forsythe You will reply that it is troubled. And with his infinite compassion he will –

Mrs Poulteney But supposing he did not! I have given... But I have not done good deeds

Mr Forsythe To give is a most excellent deed. The good Lord rewards our charity.

Mrs Poulteney *Charity...* I should visit the poor. But visiting always so distresses me. I know that is wicked.

Mr Forsythe Come, madam –

Mrs Poulteney Yes. Very wicked... I have been considering... If you knew of some lady, some refined person who has come under adverse circumstances... Someone of irreproachable moral character... Certainly not a Catholic... Preferably someone with no relatives...

Mr Forsythe I am not quite clear what you intend.

Mrs Poulteney I would be willing... to provide a home for such a person. I believe God would approve.

Mr Forsythe Very good, madam. If you so wish it, I shall make enquiries. Indeed, I believe an eligible has already occurred to me.

Mrs Poulteney Who?

The Writer, now mobile with notebook and pen, takes us across to –

Scene 2 - "Who is she?"

Mrs Tranter's Drawing Room

Charles, Mrs Tranter with needlework, and Ernestina has a book

Charles But who is she?

Ernestina It must have been poor Mystery.

Writer No - *Tragedy*.

Ernestina It must have been poor Tragedy.

Charles *Tragedy?*

Ernestina A nickname... One of her nicknames.

Charles and what are the others?

Ernestina The fishermen have a gross name for her – they call her –

Mrs Tranter (*warning*) Ernestina.

Ernestina – The French Lieutenant's woman.

Mrs Tranter Ernestina Freeman!

Ernestina (*interrupting*) She is mad.

Mrs Tranter That is too cruel, my dear. Her name, Charles, is Miss Sarah Woodruff -

*The Writer looks at Sarah for a reaction.
He signals from Mrs Tranter to continue.*

- and she is a very unfortunate girl who has suffered greatly.

Charles How so?

Mrs Tranter When she first came to Lyme, she was employed as governess to –

- Writer* (looking at his note) Oh... I don't know, it's not important... erm... *Talbot*.
- Mrs Tranter* Mrs Talbot's beautiful children. You will be sure to meet Captain Talbot and his family while you are here, Charles.
- Charles* (intrigued) Indeed... But who is this French Lieutenant?
- Ernestina* A man she is said to have...
- Mrs Tranter* (looks at her reproachfully) *Ernestina!*
- Charles* Fallen in love with?
- Ernestina* Worse than that..
- Mrs Tranter* Ernestina! Please! The year before last, Charles, a French ship was driven ashore in a dreadful storm. None of the poor crew was saved.
- Writer* No, that's to much – three of them.
- Mrs Tranter* Only three of the poor crew were saved and they were taken in by the people of Lyme. Two were simple sailors, the other, I understand, was the lieutenant of the vessel.
- Ernestina* His leg had been crushed but he clung onto a spar and was washed ashore!
- Mrs Tranter* Captain Talbot, as a naval officer himself, most kindly charged upon his household the care of the foreign officer. He spoke no English and so Ms Woodruff was called to interpret and look after his needs.
- Ernestina* But this French officer proved to be no gentleman.
- Charles* I see... Is there a child?
- Mrs Tranter* No. It is all gossip. No misconduct took place as far as Miss Woodruff is concerned, indeed, it seems that the Frenchman plighted his troth. However, he was nothing but a heartless deceiver.
- Charles* (looking out of the window) But is she so ostracised that she has to spend her days out there on the Cobb?
- Ernestina* He abandoned her and they say she waits for him to return.
- Charles* Ah... How very romantic...
- Ernestina* Romantic? And you the scientist, the despiser of novels, indeed!
- Charles* Ernestina -

Ernestina It is true and I will hear no denial. Aunt, are we to accept such a conclusion from a man who spends his time scrabbling among rocks and caves in search of dried up old fossils.

Mrs Tranter Well, my dear, I do think –

Ernestina Charles, I'm sure we provide ample entertainment for you on the odd afternoons you honour us with your presence but we must not detain you from Mr Darwin a moment longer.

Mrs Tranter My dearest –

The Writer quickly tears a piece of paper from his notebook and hands it to Ernestina.

Ernestina No, aunt, you will hear. Charles this morning I received a letter from Papa.

Charles (*worried*) Ah...

Ernestina It refers to your discussion with my father last Thursday.

Charles ...I was afraid it might.

Ernestina I know that something happened over the port.

Charles My dear Mrs Tranter...Ernestina, I confess your father and I had a small philosophical disagreement.

Ernestina I knew it! That is very wicked of you.

Charles I meant it to be very honest of me.

Ernestina And what was the subject of your conversation?

Charles Your father ventured the opinion that Mr Darwin should be exhibited in a cage in the zoological Gardens. In the monkey house, in fact. I simply tried to explain some of the scientific arguments behind the Darwinian position... I was unsuccessful.

Ernestina How could you, Charles, when you know Papa's views!

Charles I was most respectful.

Ernestina Which means you were most hateful.

Charles He did say that he would not let his daughter marry a man who considered his grandfather to be an ape. But I think on reflection he will recall that in my case it was a titled ape.

Writer (*laughing*) Ha, ha, very good... Yes... Excellent.

*Ernestina looks hurt by this.
Mrs Tranter is aware it is a sensitive subject.*

(to Mrs Tranter) Oh... I think you'd better leave them to it.

Mrs Tranter You will excuse me one moment, my deals. I must speak to Mary.

She leaves. Charles goes to Ernestina.

Charles My darling... We have settled this between us. It is perfectly proper that you should be afraid of your father. But I'm not marrying him. And you must remember I'm a scientist. I have written a monograph, so I must be –

Ernestina smiles.

And if you smile like that I shall devote *all* my time to the fossils and none to you.

Ernestina I am not disposed to be jealous of the fossils as the Cobb is covered in them and it seemed you barely noticed.

Charles I was too busy performing my chivalric duties for poor Mystery.

Ernestina Tragedy! Too busy even to show any interest in Louisa's steps, no doubt?

Charles Whose steps?

Ernestina The very steps Jane Austen made poor Louisa Musgrove fall down in Persuasion.

Charles Well, as I said before, how very romantic...

They smile and embrace.

Cross fade to –

Sarah, who has been on stage throughout the previous scene, turns and stares at The Writer, who has also been watching the action. He takes up the challenge of her stare and picks up a Bible, he hands it to her and then the lights change and he motions to her to begin.

Writer Please...

Scene 3 – "I do not like the French..."

Marlborough House

*Sarah Woodruff, Mrs Poulteney, Mrs Fairley and the vicar, Mr Forsythe.
Sarah finishes reading from the Bible; Psalm 119 –*

Sarah Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord.
 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.
 They also do no iniquity: they walk in his ways.
 Thou has commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently.
 O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!
 Then shall I not be ashamed when I have respect unto all thy commandments.

She stops reading and lowers her head.

Mrs Poulteney You look closer to twenty-five than the thirty I was led to believe.

Sarah remains silent, her head bowed.

As Reverend Forsythe has made you aware, I wish to take a secretary. I have difficulty in writing now and Mrs Fairley reads so poorly. The position will also carry the responsibility of various charitable duties such as the delivery of my religious pamphlets to the houses of Lyme. One cannot do too much for the poor of spirit in these dark times. I understand your circumstances have been... adverse.

Sarah remains silent.

However... I am told that you left your last position without giving notice. Why?

Mr Forsythe Mrs Poulteney, I think perhaps we should not –

Mrs Poulteney Why?

Silence.

*Sarah suddenly turns and addresses the Writer directly.
 During the following exchange the other characters remain still.
 (Lights may change to indicate Sarah coming out of the play)*

Sarah What precisely am I to say?

Writer *(taken aback at first)* Er... *(he looks at his papers)* something like, "I was so sick, ma'am. I had no choice."

Sarah But that is wrong. I could have stayed with the Talbots.

Writer Yes, but you were in love, weren't you? Desperately in love. So you tell Mrs Poulteney you had to leave because you were unwell.

Sarah No. It is a lie.

Writer Then, what would you say?

Sarah I would say... nothing.

Writer Nothing? I see.

*The Writer signals for Mrs Poulteney to carry on.
(lights change back if necessary)*

Mrs Poulteney (*exactly as before*) I am told that you left your last position without giving notice. Why?

Silence as Sarah's head remains bowed and she says nothing.

I am also informed that you retain an attachment to a foreign person.

Writer (*to himself*) Yes...

Mrs Poulteney scrutinises Sarah.

Mrs Poulteney I do not like the French. And I will certainly have no French books in my house.

Sarah I possess none. Nor English, ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney You have surely your own Bible?

Sarah shakes head.

Mr Forsythe I will attend to that, my dear Mrs Poulteney. And may I add, Miss Woodruff's father although a simple farmer, was a man of excellent principles and highly respected. He most wisely provided his daughter with a better education than one can expect.

Mrs Poulteney You are constant in your attendance at Divine service?

Sarah Yes, ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney Let it remain so. God consoles us all in adversity.

Sarah I try to share your belief, ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney What if this... person should return; what then?

Sarah simply bows her head and shakes it.

Very well... Let us test this education of yours. You will take some dictation.

The Writer gives Sarah his pen and notebook.

Charles and Sam enter, Charles has shaving cream on his face, Sam sets up the shaving table. Simultaneously, Mrs Poulteney smells something disagreeable.

Mrs Poulteney Mrs Fairley! Someone has left the window open! Kindly close it! I can smell sheep.

Mrs Fairley bobs and exits.

Cross fade to -

Scene 4 - "Quod est demonstrandum..."

The White Lion Hotel

*Charles takes a deep breath as he looks out.
Sound of sheep in the street below.*

Charles Upon my word, Sam, on a day like this I could contemplate never setting eyes on London again.

Sam (*grumpily*) If you goes on standing in the air, sir, you won't neither.

Charles Sam, you've been drinking again.

Sam No, sir.

Charles sits ready to be shaved by Sam who stands waiting, sharpening the blade.

Charles Is your new room better?

Sam Yes, sir.

Charles And the commons?

Sam Very acceptable, sir.

Charles Quod est demonstrandum - you have the hump on a morning that would make a miser sing. Ergo, you have been drinking.

Sam It's that there kitchen girl at Mrs Tranter's, sir. I ain't half going -

Charles (*removing the blade from his throat*) Explain yourself.

Sam I sees 'er. Down out there. And right across the street she calls.

Charles And what did she call pray?

Mary runs across the stage and shouts at Sam, who sees her in his mind's eye.

Mary 'Ave yer got a bag of soot?

Sam 'Ave yer got a bag of soot?

Mary exits laughing.

Charles (*smiling*) I think I know the girl. Dark hair?... Very ugly?

Sam Not exactly ugly. Leastways not in looks.

Charles Aha. So, Cupid is being unfair to cockneys.

Sam I wouldn't touch with a barge pole! She's a bloomin' milkmaid. But it's the 'umiliation, Mr Charles. I mean all the ostlers 'eard.

Charles I shouldn't worry about that, Sam. There are only two of them in the whole of Lyme. (*taking the razor*) Now, get me my breakfast, there's a good fellow. And let me have a double dose of muffins.

Sam (*exiting*) Yes, sir.

Charles (*stopping him at the door*) And, Sam, we have come here principally to accompany Ms Freeman's recuperation and also in the pursuit of the elusive echinoderm in this rare outcrop of blue lias. Yes?

Sam Begin' your pardon, sir?

Charles To hunt for fossils, Sam.

Sam Oh yes... of course.

Charles Of course. So do I really need to stress the importance of you keeping yourself out of trouble, especially the kind that troubles my future wife's maids? Is that clear?

Sam But Sir –

Charles These country girls are much too timid to call such rude things at distinguished young London gentleman unless they have been sorely provoked. I gravely suspect, Sam, that you've been fast.

Sam is about to protest –

And if you are not doubly *fast* with my breakfast I shall *fasten* my boot onto the posterior portion of your miserable anatomy.

Sam Yes, sir.

Sam leaves.

Charles pulls a serious face in the mirror then smiles and starts to shave.

Cross fade to -

Scene 5 - "You look to sea..."
Marlborough House, as before.

- Mrs Poultney* (*perusing Sarah's dictation*) I am told that you are always to be seen in the same places when you go out... You look to sea... I am satisfied that you are in a state of repentance for your past sin. Indeed, I cannot believe that you should be anything else in your present circumstances.
- Sarah* I am grateful to you, ma'am.
- Mrs Poultney* I'm not concerned with your gratitude to me. There is one above who has a prior claim.
- Sarah* How should I not know it?
- Mrs Poultney* However, to the ignorant it may seem you are persevering in your sin.
- Sarah* If they know my story, ma'am, they cannot think that.
- Mrs Poultney* But they do think that. I'm told they say you look for Satan's Sails.
- Sarah* (*looking at The Writer*) Do you wish to take me on?
- Mrs Poultney* I wish you to show that this person is expunged from your heart. I know that he is. But you must show it
- Sarah* (*to The Writer*) How might show it?
- Mrs Poultney* By walking elsewhere. By not *exhibiting* your shame. If for no other reason, because I request it.
- Sarah* (*looking in Mrs Poultney's eyes for the first time*) I will do as you wish, ma'am.
- Mrs Poultney* I do not wish to deny you the benefits of the sea air completely. Dr Grogan has advised me that due to your... state of mind... you should be allowed one afternoon a week to spend as you so wish. I would remind you that this is highly irregular as those in my employ are nominally allowed but one half day a month as free time. However... you may walk by the sea on occasion. But pray, do not stand and stare so.

Music.

Cross fade to -

Charles is dressed solemnly in the paraphernalia of 19th century fossil hunting. The Writer again helps by handing Sam various pieces of equipment.

Writer (to Charles) Go on, Charles... Go and find her...

Looking fairly ridiculous, Charles leaves and walks to –

Scene 6 - "I prefer to walk alone..."

The Undercliff

Sounds of birds and distant sea.

Charles, looking for fossils, comes across Sarah sleeping. He approaches and she starts. She gathers herself and walks off. He moves after her.

Charles Madam!... Forgive me, I was afraid lest you had been taken ill... I believe I also owe you another apology. The other day, on the Cobb... I fear I addressed you in the most impolite manner.

Sarah It is no matter, sir.

Charles May I not accompany you since we walk in the same direction.

Sarah I prefer to walk alone

Charles It was Mrs Tranter who made me aware of my error. My name is –

Sarah I know who you are, sir. Kindly allow me to go my way alone...

Sarah moves off.

Charles But Madam -

Charles trips and falls. Sarah hears his cry and turns, considers what to do then returns to help him. She is obviously more adept at moving in this landscape.

Thank you... It is dangerous here.
May I not accompany you?

Sarah (*moving off again*) I prefer to walk alone. That is what I came here to do.

Charles Forgive me but... It seems the tide has cut me off. I am somewhat lost... Which way should I...

Sarah (*pointing*) That path leads back to Lyme along the Undercliff.

Sarah goes again then quickly turns back.

And please tell no one you have seen me in this place.

Sarah leaves. The Writer and Charles watch her go.

Cross fade to –

Scene 7 - "A demang, madymosselle..."

Mrs Tranter's House

Sam is delivering flowers from Charles for Ernestina.

Mary is peeling apples.

Sam (producing a bunch of flowers) For the beautiful lady upstairs.

Mary (Disappointed) Oh.

Sam (producing some more flowers) And for the even more lovely one down.

Mary takes the flowers and smiles.

Mary (looking at Charles' flowers) I think, you're very lucky to serve such a lovely gentleman. He's so kind to Miss Freeman, following her down here and being at her beck and call all day. I feel sorry for him - she don't deserve it.

Sam I thought she was consumptive. That's why she's down here, ain't it?

Mary Well, I haven't seen anything that looks that way. Dare say she's right as rain. It's her parents fussing, that's all.

Sam I admire, Mr Freeman, I do. Think he's done well, he has. Building himself up to where he is now... That's what I want, a business of my own.

Mary (shocked) Oh yes?

Sam Yes - don't see why not.

Mary What sort of business?

Sam Haberdashery.

Mary (impressed) Oh...

Sam Yes, I've been plannin' it for a while now. Believe I've got a flair for it. Seen many a fashionable window on my travels with Mr Smithson. In Paris, Rome -

Mary Paris? I'd love to see Paris!

Sam Maybe you will... One day.

Mary smiles, embarrassed.

Mrs Fairley enters and, seeing them, stops to watch.

Simply say, 'is lordship 'as gone diggin' again. And apologises most profussly.

Mary She won't be too pleased.

Sam I'll bet. No way to treat a lady, I'm sure.

Mary And you'd know I suppose.

They smile at each other.

Sam Well, dare say we'll meet tomorrow mornin'.

Mary Happen so.

He turns to go then decides to take his chance.

Sam Dare say you got a suitor and all.

Mary None I really likes.

Sam I bet you have. I heard you have.

Mary It's all talk in this old place. Us isn't allowed to look at a man and we and 'im are courtin'.

Sam Like that everywhere... I ain't so bad.

Mary I never said 'ee was.

Sam How about London then? Fancy seeing London?

Mary smiles and nods firmly.

Expect you will. When they are married off upstairs. I'll show you around.

Mary Don't believe 'ee.

Sam Cross my heart. A demang, madymosselle.

Mary What's that then?

Sam It's French for Coombe Street, tomorrow morning, me lady – where yours truly will be waiting.

He starts to exit rather too suavely.

Writer Watch where you're going, Sam.

Sam trips and falls.

Oops!

*Sam gets up proudly and walks off. Mary laughs and, after smiling to herself, she exits.
Mrs Fairley also leaves.*

Cross fade to –

Scene 8 - "It is most likely all the excitement..."

Marlborough House

*A grandfather clock marks the time.
Mrs Poulteney and Sarah. Millie, a servant, enters.*

Millie Mrs Tranter, her niece and Mr Smithson have arrived, ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney (*watching Sarah*) Show them in.

Sarah goes to leave by another door.

Millie Yes ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney You will stay, Miss Woodruff, if you please.

Sara stops and turns slowly.

Ms Freeman is a frivolous young woman and I am sure the same will be the case of her intended. You will observe and learn much, I believe.

Mrs Tranter, Charles and Ernestina enter. Sarah stands to one side.

Mrs Tranter (*holding out her hands*) My dear Mrs Poulteney. It is a pleasure to see you.

Mrs Poulteney (*reluctantly taking her hand*) Mrs Tranter.

Mrs Tranter And you will remember my niece, Ernestina.

Ernestina How are you, Mrs Poulteney? You look exceedingly well.

Mrs Poulteney At my age, Miss Freeman, spiritual health is all that counts.

Ernestina Then I have no fears for you.
Madam, Mr Charles Smithson.

Charles (*bending over the proffered hand*) Great pleasure, ma'am. Charming house.

Mrs Poulteney It is too large for me. I keep it on for my dear husband's sake.

Mrs Poulteney looks out front as if at a grand portrait of Mr Poulteney.

I know he would have wished – he wishes it so.

Charles Ah, indeed. I understand. Most natural.

Mrs Poulteney And this is my new secretary, Miss Sarah Woodruff.

Ernestina (intrigued to finally meet the infamous woman) Miss Woodruff. I have heard so much about you. Do you remember, Charles? You met Miss Woodruff last week on the Cobb.

Mrs Poulteney Indeed?

Charles No, madam. You mistake, Ernestina, we have never actually met.
(*to Sarah*) Miss Woodruff.

Sarah bows.

Charles watches closely to see if Sarah will give away their meeting. She does not.

Mrs Tranter (*to Sarah*) My dear Miss Woodruff, it is a pleasure to see you... Will you come to see me when dear Tina has gone?

Sarah nods.

Mrs Poulteney (*sternly*) Miss Woodruff is now under my moral guidance. She no longer frequents the Cobb.
Now, be seated everyone.

Everyone does as ordered.

I thought we should take a little hot chocolate later. I have just lunched with Lady Cotton and I feel that will suffice.

Mrs Poulteney motions to Millie who bobs and leaves.

Mrs Tranter Indeed, Mrs Poulteney, that would be most gratifying. And how is Lady Cotton, may I ask? She is such a worthy member of our community, Charles. So charitable. She presides over a missionary society here and is an example to us all.

Charles Indeed.

Ernestina and Charles share a look of boredom.

Mrs Poulteney bristles at this praise for her rival, Lady Cotton.

Mrs Poulteney She is as to be expected. However, I must say I was disappointed with the service at her table. Very slipshod and not befitting one of her rank at all.

- Mrs Tranter* Really? I am surprised. She does take so many unfortunates into her employ. Perhaps they are, as yet, not so experienced.
- Mrs Poulteney* It is all very well taking in the unfortunate, Mrs Tranter, however, standards must be upheld. It is imperative. (*referring to Sarah*) That is our duty to these people.
- Mrs Tranter* Of course.
- Mrs Poulteney* That girl I dismissed, Mrs Tranter – she has given you no further trouble?
- Mrs Tranter* Mary? I would not part with her for the world.
- Mrs Poulteney* Mrs Fairley informs me that she saw the girl only the other morning talking with a person... A young person. Mrs Fairley did not know him.
- Charles* Then no doubt it was Sam. My servant, madam.
- Ernestina* (*trying to be grown up*) I meant to tell you Charles. I too saw them talking together yesterday.
- Charles* (*laughing*) But surely... We are not to forbid them to speak together if they meet?

Sarah looks up at this, watching Charles carefully.

- Ernestina* Charles, there is a world of difference between what may be accepted in London and what is proper here. I think you should speak to Sam. The girl is too easily led.
- Mrs Tranter* My dear Ernestina, she may be high-spirited. But I've never had the least cause to –
- Ernestina* My dear kind aunt, I'm well aware of how fond you are of her but –
- Charles* I wish that more mistresses were as fond. There is no sure sign of a happy house than a happy maidservant at its door.
- Mrs Poulteney* (*sternly*) Your future wife is a better judge than you are of such matters, Mr Smithson. I know the girl in question. I had to dismiss her. If you were older you would know one cannot be too strict in such matters.

A very awkward silence.

- Charles* I bow to your far greater experience, madam.

Ernestina, deeply upset by Mrs Poulteney's words to Charles, starts to cry and then rushes out.

Ernestina You will excuse me...

Mrs Tranter My dear?

Mrs Poulteney Well!

Charles I will go and attend to her. It is most likely all the excitement.

He leaves.

Mrs Tranter Oh my dear, Mrs Poulteney, the poor child is not well. She has come to Lyme to take the air after all.

Mrs Poulteney This is most irregular. I fear the influence of London society on her, Mrs Tranter.

Cross over to –

Scene 9 – "I'm a Derby duck, sir..."

Mrs Tranter's house

Charles and Ernestina enter

Ernestina (*still distressed*) Oh, Charles, I cannot believe that you should suffer at the hands of that woman because of... because of a fit of pique on my part. It is unbearable.

Charles My dear, I assure you it is of no consequence. The likes of Mrs Poulteney may think what they will. I'm more concerned about the beliefs of my future wife. My sweet Tina, why should we deny to others what has made us both so happy? What if this wicked maid and my rascal Sam should fall in love? Are we to throw stones?

Ernestina They could not possibly feel what I feel.

Charles Well... We'll have it out with him now.

Ernestina (*shocked*) Charles! You cannot mean it.

Charles Why ever not? (*rings a bell and calls out*) Mary!
If my man is causing trouble and his (*imitating Sam*) "intentions are not of the noblest" then I shall make sure he gets what's coming to him.

Ernestina Charles?

Mary enters.

Charles Ah, Mary... Is that young scoundrel servant of mine skulking round the kitchen again?

Mary (with trepidation) I believe so, sir.

Charles I thought he might be. Tell him to come up, will you?

Mary Yes, sir.

Mary goes.

Ernestina (trying to control her laughter) Charles, you are incorrigible!

Charles No, you're right, my dear, we are not in London and we do do things differently there. You shall see.

Ernestina How can you? The poor man –

Charles I simply wish to ascertain his true motives. Far be it from me to shirk my duties as his master. I'm sure Mrs Poulteney would agree. We shall have him in and question him as would the great widow of Lyme.

A knock at the door. Charles sits.

Enter!

*Sam enters cautiously.
The examiners sit before him.*

Sam (bowing) Miss Freeman... Mr Charles...

Charles (turning to him) I have decided, Sam, that I do not need you here anymore. You may return to Kensington tomorrow... You have nothing to say?

Sam (awkward in front of Ernestina) Yes, sir. Be 'appier here.

Charles I have decided you are up to no good. I'm well aware that is your natural condition. But I prefer you to be up to no good in London. Which is more used to up-to-no-gooders.

Sam Ain't done nothing, Mr Charles.

Charles I also wish to spare you the pain of having to meet that impertinent young maid of Mrs Tranter's again... Is that not kind of me?

Sam She has made apologies. I have accepted them.

Charles What! From a mere milkmaid? Impossible!

Sam It was ignorance, Mr Charles. If you will excuse me, Miss Freeman, nothing but ignorance.

Charles I see. Then matters are worse than I thought. You must certainly decamp... Now what is wrong?

Sam Er, sir...

Charles Ursa? *(to Ernestina)* Is he speaking Latin now?

*Ernestina has to look away to contain her laughter.
Charles gets up and starts to move around Sam.*

Never mind, my wit is beyond you, you bear. Now this charming Miss Mary may be great fun to tease and be teased by – let me finish – but I am assured by Mrs Tranter that she is a gentle and trusting creature at heart. I will not have that heart broken.

Sam *(earnestly)* Cut off me arm, Mr Charles.

Charles Very well. I believe you – without the amputation. But you will not come to this house again, or address the young woman in the street, until I have spoken with Mrs Tranter and found whether she permits your attentions.

Sam *(bowled over)* I'm a Derby duck, sir. A bloomin' Derby duck.

Charles I am very pleased for you. Now – you may go.

Sam leaves and Ernestina collapses in hysterics.

Sarah enters and watches them.

Ernestina *(recalling their dispute)* Oh, Charles, I do love you so. Let us never ever argue again.

Charles *(kissing her head)* My sweet child. You will always be that to me.

He bends over to kiss her lips.

Ernestina Eighty-eight days. I cannot bear the thought.

Charles Let us elope. And go to Paris.

Ernestina Charles! What wickedness!... *(they kiss)*... If the worthy Mrs P. could see us now.

Cross fade to –

Scene 10 – "You have been seen walking on the Undercliff..."**Marlborough house***Mrs Poultenev, Mrs Fairley and Sarah*

- Sarah Is something wrong, Mrs Poultenev?
- Mrs Poultenev Something is very wrong. I have been told something I can hardly believe.
- Sarah To do with me?
- Mrs Poultenev I should never have listened to Reverend Forsythe. I should have listened to the dictates of my own common sense.
- Sarah What have I done?
- Mrs Poultenev I do not think you are mad at all. You are a cunning wicked creature. You know very well what you have done.
- Sarah I will swear on the Bible –
- Mrs Poultenev You will do nothing of the sort! That is blasphemy.
- Sarah I must insist on knowing of what I am accused.
- Mrs Poultenev You have been seen walking on the Undercliff!
- Sarah And where is the sin in that?
- Mrs Poultenev The sin! You, a young woman, alone, in such a place!
- Sarah But, ma'am, it is nothing but a large wood.
- Mrs Poultenev I know very well what it is. And what goes on there. The sort of person who frequents it.
- Sarah No one frequents it. That is why I go there – to be alone –
- Mrs Poultenev Do you contradict me, miss! Am I not to know of what I speak?

*Silence**(More controlled)* You have distressed me deeply.

- Sarah But how was I to tell? I am not to go to the sea. Very well, I do not go to the sea. I wish for solitude. That is all. That is not a sin. With all respect, ma'am, I will not be called a sinner for that.
- Mrs Poultenev *(thrown by this logic)* Have you never heard speak of the Undercliff?

Sarah As the kind of place you imply – never.

A pause as Mrs Poulteney considers this.

Mrs Poulteney Very well... Since you are not from Lyme perhaps that is so. But let it be understood. I permit no one in my employ to go or be seen near that place. You will confine your walks to where it is seemly. Do I make myself clear?

Sarah Yes. I am to walk in the paths of righteousness.

For a moment, Mrs Poulteney suspects she has been the victim of sarcasm but Sarah has bowed her head.

Mrs Poulteney Then let us hear no more of this foolishness. I do this for your own good.

Sarah I know and I thank you, ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney Now, you will read to me. Psalm 140, I think.

Sarah goes to the lectern, and opens the Bible. She reads the first two lines then and Ernestina starts to read and Sarah fades under her.

Sarah "Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man: preserve me from the violent man. Which imagine mischiefs in their heart – continually are they gathered together for war. (*Ernestina begins reading below*) They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent; adders poison is under their lips."

Crossover to –

Scene 11 – "He parts the masses of her golden hair..."

Mrs Tranter's drawing room

Charles smoking and Tina with a book by the fire.

Ernestina (*reading*) "He parts the masses of her golden hair,
He lifts her, helpless, with a shuddering care,
He looks into her face with awestruck eyes; –
She dies – the darling of his soul – she dies!"

She looks suspiciously at Charles who nods solemnly.

"You might have heard, through that thought's fearful shock,
The beating of his heart like some huge clock;
And then the strong pulse falter and stand still,
When lifted from that fear with sudden thrill,
Which from those blanched lips low and trembling came:"

Another look at her fiancé, whose eyes are closed now.

"Oh! Claude – the pain! Gertrude, my beloved!
Then faintly on her lips a wan smile moved,
Which dumbly spoke of comfort from his tone –"
You've gone to sleep, you hateful mutton bone!

The book becomes a missile.

CHARLES!

Charles (waking) Yes?... Oh dear.

Ernestina You are caught, sir. You have no excuse.

Cross back to –

Sarah (finishing her reading and covering her head with her hood)

"Oh God the Lord the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my my head in the day of battle..."

*She turns and we are in the Undercliff -
Charles and Sarah at either ends of the narrow path*

Scene 12 – "I have ties..."
The Undercliff

Sarah I did not know you were here, sir.

Charles How should you?

Sarah You will excuse me. I must return.

Charles Will you permit me to say something first? Something I have perhaps, as a stranger to you and your circumstances, no right to say. Mrs Tranter believes you are not happy in your present situation. I am confident she... that is Mrs Tranter... would like... Is most anxious to help you, if you wish to find another position.

Sarah merely shakes her head in response.

I understand you have excellent qualifications. I'm sure a much happier use could be found of them elsewhere. London perhaps?

Sarah (looking out to sea) I thank you. But I cannot leave this place.

Charles Then once again I have to apologise for intruding on your privacy. I shall not do so again.

He starts to go.

Sarah I know Mrs Tranter wishes to be kind.

Charles Then permit her to have her wish. Miss Woodruff, let me be frank. I have heard it said that you are... not altogether of sound mind. I think that is very far from true. You are young. You are able to gain your living. You have no family ties, I believe, that confine you to Dorset.

Sarah I have ties.

Charles To this French Lieutenant?
If he does not return, he is not worthy of you. If you does, I cannot believe he will be so easily put off, should he not find you in Lyme, as not to discover where you are and follow you there. Now surely that is common sense?

Sarah He will never return.

Charles You fear he will never return.

Sarah He will never return.

Sarah makes to go.

Charles (*trying to detain her*) I do not take your meaning.

Sarah (*moving past him*) I have long since received a letter.

Charles Ms Woodruff!

Sarah (*exiting.*) He is married.

Charles watches her go, standing in amazement.

Scene change – music.

Sarah, back at Marlborough House, rips off her outer garments in despair.

Charles is changed by Sam.

Ernestina is changed by Mary.

They are preparing for the evening recital.

Cross fade to –

Scene 13 – "Saved by the Lord..."
The Assembly Rooms.

Ensemble scene: the good people of Lyme have gathered for a recital.

Mrs Tranter Charles, everyone is here tonight. The whole of Lyme is out to hear Mr Forsythe's soprano. That is Mrs Elliott, Charles, the kindest old soul, somewhat hard of hearing. She lives in that house above Elm Street... the one we passed the other day?

Charles Ah...

Mrs Tranter Yes. Her son is now in India.

Ernestina Charles... She is a perfect gooseberry... Look at her! Deaf as a post and that hat! (*seeing another lady in an old-fashioned frock*) Oh no... Charles, look Mr Davies is here in her best bonnet. Oh bless her... She might have just walked out of the museum!

Mrs Tranter (*to Miss Davies*) Ah, Miss Davies, you look very smart this evening. It is so delightful to see you.

Miss Davies Oh, thank you Mrs Tranter.

Ernestina pulls Charles away.

Ernestina I am not having them all pawing over you, Charles. They are all staring so and I shall protect you, my dear. Or perhaps I should present you to Mrs Fairweather –

Charles sees the old, harsh looking woman.

Charles No.

Ernestina I will then you can have an eyewitness account of the goings-on in the Early Cretaceous Era.

Charles (*smiling*) The Early Cretaceous is a period my dear not an era.

Ernestina Never mind. I am sure she is sufficiently old. And I know how you are bored by anything that has happened in the last ninety million years. Come.

Mr Forsythe Ladies and gentlemen? If you would kindly take your seats, Miss Jemima Sullivan accompanied by Signor Ritornello will begin her Lenten recital in the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ and his journey in the wilderness.

Charles Saved by the Lord...

Ernestina laughs and they all sit. The music begins.

*Sarah crosses downstage and looks at the townspeople.
Only Charles can see her in his thoughts.
Ernestina nudges Charles.*

Ernestina Charles! Pay attention... You might learn something... So... You must tell me did you find anything among the rocks today?

Charles (*thrown by this*) What do you mean?

Ernestina Was your grubbing a success?

Charles Oh... somewhat...

Ernestina (*smiling teasingly*) I am glad.

*They continue to listen.
Sarah is still in Charles' thoughts.
She stands as at her bedroom window looking out.*

*Suddenly, the Writer interrupts and all action and sound stops.
Lights change.*

Writer Of course, this story is all imagination. These characters you see walk and talk before you do not exist anywhere except inside my mind. (*he taps his head*) And so one might assume that I am in complete control, like some omniscient god. But, as you see, I am not...

I had planned at this point to show you Sarah's inner life - her most secret thoughts. But I know, in practice, she cannot reveal herself like that.

So, you must forgive me, but I have to admit I am not entirely sure what will happen to any of my characters from now on: to Charles, Ernestina, even that Gestapo prototype, Mrs Poulteney. There is only one true definition of God, I believe - "God is the freedom that allows other freedoms to exist". So I must conform to that now. I report only the outward facts. Sarah does not throw herself from her bedroom window. She does not kill herself. She will continue, despite Mrs Poulteney's prohibition, to haunt the Undercliff. So, I suppose, in a way, she does jump.

The Writer puts on a jacket and takes out a pair of glasses.

And meanwhile, tonight, the more privileged inhabitants of the town are gathered to enjoy this rare community entertainment; an evening so unusual, so extraordinary for Lyme that I feel I may even accept an invitation myself. I think it's time to work this story a little from within...

*Lights change back as before.
The action re-starts with everyone clapping as the song ends.
Charles is nudged again by Ernestina to applaud.*

*She smiles at him and they touch hands. He smiles back.
The audience breaks up and everyone is chatting.
The Writer whispers in Mrs Tranter's ear.*

Mr Forsythe Bravo! Bravo! Thank you! Inspiring, truly inspiring!

Ernestina (to Charles) Indeed, I never felt so inspired in my life.

Mrs Tranter brings over The Writer as Dr Grogan, an Irishman in his 50s.

The Writer (to the audience) And if you're sitting there thinking this is all just a rather unfortunate or unlucky interruption (it is scene thirteen after all) and it has nothing to do with Progress, Society, Evolution, the story I'm telling - I won't argue with you....
But I might suspect you.

The Writer now commits to the action as a character.

Mrs Tranter Charles, may I introduce Dr Grogan. He is a dear friend of ours.

Charles (bowing his head) Delighted, sir.

Grogan (trying a Dorset accent) Ah, so this is the young man responsible for digging away -
(coughing and coming out of the play, in his normal voice) Oh dear, that's not going to work...
(he clears his throat and tries another accent/voice) Ah, so this is the young man responsible for digging away -
(coming out of it again) No that's even worse. Sorry one moment...
(trying an Irish accent) Ah, so this is the young man responsible for digging away at our precious shoreline!
(to himself) Eureka!

Action resumes as the Writer has found the doctor's voice.

Ernestina (cheerfully) Good evening, Doctor. I'm so glad to see you here.

Grogan (flirtatiously) And why is that, Miss Freeman, you could not possibly have been bored by our recital could you?

Ernestina (playfully) Not at all, Doctor, how on earth could you think such a thing?

Mrs Tranter Ernestina.

Grogan No, no, Mrs Tranter. I do believe, Miss Freeman is looking a mite overawed by our festivities here in Lyme. Now, we would not want it all to become too much for her, would we? I prescribe a hot toddy washed down with some stimulating conversation. Perhaps you will all be so kind as to adjourn to my cabin.

- Ernestina* Cabin? (*teasing*) Does the good doctor live on a ship, aunt?
- Mrs Tranter* No, no, dear. Dr Grogan refers to his house as the cabin for reasons best known to himself and those who dare to visit him there. You'll excuse us, Doctor, but it is far too late for Ernestina to be visiting.
- Ernestina* (*protesting*) Aunt!
- Mrs Tranter* I shall only hear from her parents. Perhaps another day you might delight us with your conversation over dinner at *my* house. You would be most welcome.
- Grogan* (*laughing*) Ah well, it looks as if we shall just have to make do, Mr Smithson.
- Charles* I beg your pardon?
- Ernestina* Oh, Charles, do go. I want to hear all about this cabin. So we shall send you as our spy.
- Grogan* Excellent! I shall expect you after you have walked these young ladies home. (*bowing*) Ladies.

Music. Charles leads the ladies off and goes to his room.

Cross fade to –

Scene 14 - "I believe they are what you seek..."

The White Lion Hotel

Sam enters.

- Charles* Ah, Sam, there's no need for a cab; it's such a beautiful night I think I'll walk to Dr Grogan's.
- Sam* Very good Mr Charles... erm.... there's a visitor for you, sir.
- The Writer, who is waiting as Grogan, turns at this.
He has not planned for it.*
- Charles* (*looking at his watch*) Who?
- Sam* A Miss Woodruff, sir. Mrs Poulteney's secretary.
- Charles* (*trying to hide a shock*) I see... (*this is highly irregular*)... What does she want?
- Sam* She says, sir... she says that she has brought the things you asked for, sir.

Charles *Things?*

Sam The fossils, sir.

Charles Oh... well, where is she?

Sam Just outside, sir. Shall I show 'er in, sir?

Charles (*knowing this is highly unusual*) Er... Yes... Yes, show her in.

*Sam goes out. Charles is like a trapped animal.
Shortly Sam returns, followed by Sarah holding a bag.*

Sam (*enjoying this*) Miss Woodruff, sir.

Charles Good evening, Miss Woodruff.

Sarah Good evening, Miss Smithson. Please forgive this intrusion, sir, but I thought you would like to see the fossils I found today.

Charles (*aware of Sam*) Why... erm...

Sarah (*producing some fossil tests*) I believe they are what you seek?

Charles Yes... of course... That will be all, Sam.

Sam Perhaps Ms Woodruff would like some refreshment?

Charles (*unsure*) Well?

Sarah No.

Charles No, Sam... Thank you.

Sam goes. Sarah offers Charles her bag.

Sarah Will you not take them?

Charles (*nervously taking it from her and looking inside*) I'm most grateful, but I'm somewhat surprised to see you.

Sarah I wished also, Mr Smithson, to thank you... for your offer of assistance.

Charles Since you refused it, you leave me the more grateful.

Their eyes lock for a long moment.

Sarah I have no one to turn to.

- Charles* I have made it clear that Mrs Tranter –
- Sarah* - has the kindest heart. But I do not need kindness.
- Charles* Miss Woodruff, it would be most improper of me to...
- Sarah* - interest yourself further in my circumstances.
- Charles* That is what I meant to convey, yes.

Sarah looks away reprimanded.

You haven't reconsidered my suggestion – that you should leave this place?

- Sarah* If I went to London, I know what should become of me. I should become what some already call me in Lyme.
- Charles* (*shocked*) Miss Woodruff...
- Sarah* I am weak. I have sinned.
- Charles* I am most sorry for you. But I must confess I don't understand why you should seek to... as it were... make me your confident.
- Sarah* Because you have travelled, you are educated. Because you are a gentleman... Because... I don't know. I live among pious Christian people and yet they seem to me crueler than the cruellest heathens, stupider than the stupidest animals. I cannot believe that life is without understanding or compassion – that there are not spirits generous enough to understand what I have suffered and that, whatever sins I have committed, it is wrong that I should suffer so much. Why am I born what I am? Why am I not born Miss Freeman?
- Charles* That question were better not asked. Envy is perhaps forgivable in your –
- Sarah* Not envy. Incomprehension.
- Charles* It is beyond my powers to help you here.
- Sarah* I do not – I will not believe that...

*He looks at her in astonishment.
He has never been spoken to by a woman like this.*

Now I have offended you.

- Charles* You bewilder me, Miss Woodruff. I do not know what you can expect of me that I haven't already offered.

Sarah I should like to tell you of what happened eighteen months ago.

Charles *(moving to the door)* That is none of my business.

Sarah sinks to her knees.

(shocked) Miss Woodruff?

Sarah You are my last resource. You are not cruel, I know you are not cruel.

Charles You must understand I have no choice.

Sarah *(urgently)* This evening I was nearly overcome with madness. I felt I had to see you, to speak to you. You were not here so I presumed you were at the Assembly Rooms, at the recital. I would've gone there to ask you had not... had not some last remnant of sanity mercifully stopped me at the door.

Charles But this is unforgivable. Unless I'm mistaken, you now threaten me with a scandal.

Sarah *(shaking her head)* I would rather die than you should think that of me. But I do not know where to turn, what to do... Please can you not understand? I am not yet mad but unless I am helped I shall be.

Charles I must go. I am expected by Dr Grogan.

Sarah All I ask is that you meet me once more on the Undercliff.

Charles *(turning away)* That is impossible.

Sarah I ask but one hour of your time.
(to The Writer) If you should do me such service I promise to follow whatever advice you wish to give.

Writer Really?

Sarah Yes.

Writer Very well.

Charles turns back and looks at her.

Sarah The old woman's cottage between the path and the shore... I shall be there tomorrow afternoon.

Sarah leaves.

Charles, dazed, drains his glass then walks with it into –

Scene 15 – "We make our destinies by the gods we choose..."***Dr Grogan's house****Charles and Dr Grogan having drinks.**The Writer quickly reverts back to Grogan, refilling Charles' glass.*

Grogan Ah, you see, now these handsome fellows could explain it all much better than I.

Charles *(lost in thought)* Mmm?

Grogan points to two busts.

Grogan You must identify them for me. A little harmless game I play. Whom do you see before you?

Charles Well... I'm... I recognise Bentham, do I not?

Grogan You do. And the other lump of Parian?

Charles I believe that's Voltaire.

Grogan Indeed a double hit! Good God I couldn't hope for that amongst the great and good of Lyme.

Charles From these two I must deduce we subscribe to the same party.

Grogan Has an Irishman a choice, Smithson? But I'm not conversing with a socialist, am I?

Charles Not as yet.

Grogan Mind you, in this age of steam and cant, I could forgive a man anything – except Vital Religion.

Charles Indeed.

They both drink and look up at the busts.

Grogan We make our destinies by the gods we choose.

Charles Yes... Indeed... *(trying a different tack)* And being a man of science living in Lyme, are you interested in palaeontology?

Grogan No, sir. I had better own up. I do not wish to spoil such a delightful first meeting but I'm emphatically a neo-ontologist. When we know more of the living, that will be the time to pursue the debt.

Charles (seizing the opportunity) Ah... I was introduced the other day to a specimen of the local flora that inclines me to agree with you... Very strange case. No doubt you know more of it than I do. I think her name is Ms Woodruff. She is employed by Mrs Poulteney.

Grogan Ah yes. Poor "Tragedy".

Charles I am being indiscreet. Perhaps she is a patient of yours.

Grogan Well, I attend Mrs Poulteney. And I would not allow a bad word to be said about *her*.

Charles glances at him cautiously then smiles.

We know more about the fossils out there on the beach than we do about what takes place in that girl's mind. There is a clever German, Dr Hartman, who has recently divided melancholia into several different types. One he calls natural. By which he means, one is born with a sad temperament. Another he calls occasional, by which he means, springing from an occasion. This, you understand, we all suffer from at times. The third class he calls obscure melancholia. By which he really means, poor man, that he doesn't know what the devil it is that causes it.

Charles But she had an occasion, did she not?

Grogan Oh come now, is she the first young woman who has been jilted? I could tell you of a dozen others here in Lyme.

Charles In such brutal circumstances?

Grogan Worse, some of them. And today they're as merry as crickets.

Charles So you class Ms Woodruff in the obscure category?

Grogan I was called in – all this, you understand, in the strictest confidence – I was called in to see her some time ago. Now I could see what was wrong at once – weeping without reason, not talking, a look about the eyes. Melancholia as plain as measles. And I think, well the cause is plain – six days, six hours at Marlborough House is enough to drive any normal being into Bedlam. Between ourselves, Smithson, I'm an old heathen. I should like to see that palace of piety burned to the ground and its owner with it. I'll be damned if I wouldn't dance a jig on the ashes.

Charles I think I might well join you.

Grogan And begad, we wouldn't be the only ones! The whole town would be out. But that's neither here nor the other place. I did what I could for the girl. But I saw there was only one cure.

Charles Get her away.

Grogan (*nodding*) A few days later, Grogan is coming into his house one afternoon and this colleen's walking towards the Cobb. I have her in. I talk to her. I even tell her of a position with a colleague of mine in Exeter, who was then looking out for a governess.

Charles But she wouldn't leave!

Grogan It's like jumping a jarvey over a ten foot wall! She goes to a house she must know is a living misery, to a mistress who never knew the difference between servant and slave. And there she is, she won't be moved. It is as if the woman has become addicted to melancholia as one becomes addicted to opium. Do you see how it is? Her sadness becomes her happiness. She wants to be a sacrificial victim, Smithson. Where you and I flinch back, she leaps forward. She is possessed, you see. Your ammonites will never hold such mysteries as that. Dark indeed. Very dark.

Charles She is a hopeless case then?

Grogan In the sense you intend, yes. Medicine can do nothing. One must see her as being in a mist. All we can do is wait and hope that the mists rise. Then perhaps...

Charles And if these mists do not rise of their own accord?

Grogan looks at him and shrugs.

And she has confided the real state of her mind to no one?

Grogan Her closest friend is Mrs Talbot but she tells us the girl keeps mum even with her. I flatter myself... But I most certainly failed.

Charles What if... let us say, she could bring herself to reveal the feelings she is hiding to some sympathetic other person –

Grogan She would be cured. But I'm not wholly convinced she wishes to be cured.

Charles looks at him then away.

Charles (*casually*) Have you read this fellow Darwin?

Grogan gives a sharp look, goes to his desk and brings back a copy of the Origin of Species.

Charles I did not mean to imply –

Grogan Have you read it?

Charles Yes.

Grogan Then you should know better than to talk of a great man as "this fellow".

Charles What you said earlier of palaeontology –

Grogan This book is about the living, Smithson. Not the dead.

Charles You are quite right. I apologise.

Grogan eyes him kindly.

Grogan So... You are a Darwinian, eh?

Charles Passionately.

Grogan (*laughing*) Then our destinies are chosen!

*Grogan seizes his hand and shakes it.
He releases him as we cross fade to –*

Scene 16 – "His name was Varguennes..."

The Undercliff

The next day.

*Charles, alone with his thoughts, walks through the wild space to a deserted cottage.
Sarah appears and approaches him. She stops and holds out some rocks.*

Charles You must allow me to pay you for these fossils.

She looks at him.

I am rich by chance, you are poor by chance. I think we are not to stand on such ceremony.

Sarah They are all I have to give.

Charles There is no reason why you should give me anything.

Sarah You have come.

Charles (*awkwardly*) I have come because I have satisfied myself that you do indeed need help.

Sarah motions for him to follow her.

Sarah Please...

They moved to a more secluded spot off the path.

Charles I must congratulate you. You have a genius for finding eyries.

Sarah For finding solitude.

They sit. He behind and to the side of her. She looking out to sea.

Charles Ms Woodruff... I promise not to be too severe a judge. I have no doubt the French Lieutenant was –

Sarah His name was Varguennes. He was brought to Captain Talbot's after the wreck of his ship. All but two of the others were drowned. But you have heard all this?

Charles The mere circumstance... Not what he was like.

Sarah He told me he came from Bordeaux. At the time of his wreck he said he was a first officer. But I don't know who he really was. He seemed a gentleman, that is all.
I admired his courage. His wound was most dreadful. He was in great pain those first days and in great danger. Yet he never cried out. Not the slightest groan.
He was very handsome. No man had ever paid me the kind of attention that he did. As I nursed him, he told me foolish things about myself. That he could not understand why I was not married... Such things.
He called me cruel when I would not let him kiss my hand. The day came when I thought myself cruel as well.

Charles And so you were no longer cruel.

Sarah Yes.

Charles I understand.

Sarah You cannot, Mr Smithson. Because you are not a woman. Because you are not a woman who was born to be a farmer's wife but educated to be something better. And you're not a governess, Mr Smithson, a young woman without children paid to look after children. The closest spectator of a happy marriage, home, adorable children... By the time Varguennes recovered he had declared his attachment to me.
There was talk of marriage. He wished me to go with him back to France. He made me believe that his whole happiness depended on it – that *my* happiness depended on it as well. He had found out much about me... He left, to take the Weymouth ship. He told me that he should wait one week. I said I would never follow him. But as one day passed and then another, the sense of solitude that has plagued me all my life swept back over me. I felt I would drown in it. When the fifth day came, I could endure it no longer.

Charles So you went to Weymouth?

Sarah He seemed overjoyed to see me. Was all that a lover should be. And yet, I cannot tell you how, but I knew he was changed. I saw he was insincere... a liar. I saw marriage to him would have been a marriage to a worthless adventurer. I saw all this within five minutes of that first meeting. But to see something is not the same as to acknowledge it. I stayed. I ate the supper that was served. I drank the wine he pressed on me. It did not intoxicate me. I think it made me see more clearly... Is that possible?

Charles does not answer.

He could no longer hide the nature of his real intentions towards me. Nor could I pretend to surprise. My innocence was false from the moment I chose to stay.

She turns to look at Charles.

I gave myself to him.

Charles cannot say anything looks down to avoid her eyes.

Silence

Charles I did not ask you to tell me these things.

Sarah (*turning away*) Mr Smithson, what I beg you to understand is not that I did this shameful thing, but why I did it. I did it so that I should never be the same again. I did it so that people should point at me, so that they should know that I have suffered and suffer. I could not marry that man. So I married shame. It was a kind of suicide. I knew no other way to break out of what I was. If I had left that room and returned to Mrs Talbot's, and resumed my former existence, I know that by now I should be truly dead and buy my own hand. What has kept me alive is my shame, my knowing that I'm not truly like other women. Because I have set myself beyond the pale. I am nothing. I'm hardly human anymore. I am the French Lieutenant's Whore...

He sees that she is weeping.

He left the next day. There was a ship. He had excuses. He said he would return at once. I knew he was lying... But I said nothing.

Charles When did you learn that he was married?

Sarah I received a letter a month later. I felt no pain. I replied without anger.

Charles And you have concealed this from everyone but myself?

Sarah Yes.

Charles To... punish yourself?

Sarah To be what I must be. An outcast.

Charles My dear Ms Woodruff, if every woman who'd been deceived by some unscrupulous member of my sex were to behave as you have – I fear the country would be full of outcasts.

Sarah It is, Mr Smithson.

*Sarah stands abruptly and walks to the cliff edge.
Charles quickly follows ready to seize her.*

Charles Please forgive me – I did not mean to... Please... Please step back a little. It is not safe here.

She turns and looks at him.

What you have told me does but confirm my previous sentiment. You must leave Lyme.

Sarah If I leave this place than I leave my shame and I'm lost.

Charles I must remind you of your promise to me, Miss Woodruff?

Sarah Now you know the truth can you still tender that advice?

Charles Most certainly.

Sarah Then you forgive me my sin?

Charles You put far too high a value on my forgiveness. The essential is that you forgive yourself. And you can never do that here.

Sarah You did not answer my question, Mr Smithson.

Charles I'm convinced... We are all convinced that you have done sufficient penance. I believe you are forgiven.

Sarah And now can be forgotten.

Charles We await only your decision to interest ourselves on your behalf.

Sarah I don't deserve such kindness –

Charles (*relieved*) Say no more.

Sarah I must come to Mrs Tranter's?

Charles (relieved) Excellent. There will of course be no necessity to speak of our meetings.

Sarah I shall say nothing.

Charles You have shared your secret. I think you will find it to be unburdening in many ways. You have nothing to fear from life. And now had we better not to send?

Suddenly they hear laughter from below as Sam and Mary walk into view. Charles steps away from Sarah and out of their view. Sarah also hides. Sam has his arm around Mary and is kissing her neck while she giggles. They stop and kiss passionately. Charles looks at Sarah who smiles back at him.

Mary Not here, Sam. I know a better place.

Sam You and your secret places...

Mary Come on! Quickly!

They leave and Sarah and Charles come out of hiding. They look at one another.

Charles We must never meet alone again.

Cross fade to –

Scene 17 – "Take your wages!"

Marlborough House

Mrs Poulteney stands with her back to the room.

Sarah I was told you wish to see me, ma'am.

Mrs Poulteney A month's wages are in that packet on the table. You will take it in lieu of notice. You will depart this house at your earliest convenience tomorrow morning...
(*she turns*) Did you not hear me, miss?

Sarah And am I not to be told why?

Mrs Poulteney Do you dare to be impertinent!

Sarah I dare to ask why I am dismissed.

Mrs Poulteney I shall write to Reverend Forsythe. I shall see that you are locked away. You are a public scandal... I command you to leave this room at once!

Sarah Very well. Since all I have experienced in it is hypocrisy, I shall do so with great pleasure.

She turns to leave.

Mrs Poulteney Take your wages!

Sarah (*turning back*) Keep them. And if it is possible with so small a sum of money, I suggest you purchase some instrument of torture to use upon all those wretched enough to come under your power.

Mrs Poulteney You – shall – answer – for – that!

Sarah Before God? Are you so sure you will have his ear in the world to come?

*For the first time in their relationships she smiles at Mrs Poulteney.
Mrs Poulteney clutches at her throat in horror as she swoons and falls on the floor.*

Mrs Poulteney Mrs Fairley!

Sarah turns and leaves.

Cross fade to –

Scene 18 – "She has gone missing, Charles..."

Mrs Tranter's house

Sound of thunder and rain.

Charles, stunned by the news of Sarah's dismissal, enters followed by Ernestina, Mrs Tranter.

Ernestina (*trying to get Charles's attention*) Charles?

Mrs Poulteney (*across scene calls for the second time*) Mrs Fairley!

Ernestina Charles! What is the matter with you?

Charles (*returning*) I'm sorry... When did this happen?

Mrs Tranter Last night. Mrs Poulteney asked Miss Woodruff to leave and the poor girl was only allowed to stay till this morning. The porter was instructed to take a box to your hotel.

Charles Why?

Mrs Tranter That is the depot for the coaches, you know. But the maid said she had left very early at dawn, and gave only the instructions as to her effects.

Charles And since?

- Mrs Tranter* No one has seen or heard anything of her.
- Ernestina* She has gone missing, Charles. I fear it became all too much for her.
- Charles* But... I still do not understand... Why was she dismissed?
- Mrs Tranter* I spoke to Mrs Fairley. All she said was that some disgraceful matter has come to Mrs Poultney's knowledge. That she was deeply shocked and upset... What can it be?
- Ernestina* She ought never to have been employed at Marlborough house. It was like offering a lamb to a wolf.
- Charles* But surely there is no danger of her harming herself?
- Mrs Tranter* In her state of mind, that is what we all fear. Rev Forsythe has called for men to search for her.
- Charles* Has Grogan been called to Marlborough House?
- Mrs Tranter* I saw him talking with the Reverend earlier today. He looked most agitated. Angry even. I shall not call on Mrs Poultney, no matter how ill she is.
- Ernestina* Poor Tragedy!
- Charles* Perhaps I should call on the doctor.
- Ernestina* Oh, Charles, what can you do? There are men enough to search.

Thunder and rain.

- Charles* Very like... But I must offer my assistance all same. Please excuse me, Mrs Tranter. Ernestina.

He bows and exits to the street...

Cross fade to -

Scene 19 - "I need your advice..."

Broad Street

*The Writer as Grogan speaks to Mr Forsythe.
Sam is with them. Mary stands with Millie, watching.
The storm continues...*

- Grogan* (*shouting over the rain to Forsythe*) Take some of your men and search along Golden Cap. She used to live in Charmouth, I believe, she may be heading that way.
- Forsythe* Very well. What a cruel day it is...

Grogan Indeed, indeed but hurry, man!

Forsythe speaks with the men then exits.

Ah, Smithson! What's brought you out on such a night?

Charles I have just been at Mrs Tranter's house.

Grogan Of course. How is your delightful young lady.

Charles She is well... Somewhat alarmed by the news from Marlborough house.

Grogan Indeed, the whole town is in a state of rebellion? Ha!
(*to Mary and Millie*) Mary, Millie, get yourselves home now, there's nothing for you to do here.

Sam comes forward to Charles as Grogan continues to talk with Mary and Millie.

Sam Mr Charles, I was hoping to see you sir.

Charles What is it?

Sam This, sir. (*He hands Charles a note*) It was at the hotel, sir, when we got back.

Charles takes it and ripped it open.

I thought it might be important, sir... Considering how –

Charles Very well, Sam.

Grogan (to Forsythe) Rev, take the others to find torches and look to the Undercliff. Hurry!

Forsythe moves off.

Charles (*alarmed by this and the note he moves to Grogan*) Doctor, I have something to discuss with you. I need your advice.

Grogan Do you now? Well, I'm not sure I have any left – I've given a vast amount of it away today. Mainly concerned with what should be executed upon that damned old bigot. Well, come along, I'll see if I can help you.

*Grogan and Charles move inside.
Mary re-enters and crosses to Sam.*

Mary What did it say?

Sam I don't know, it was written in French. Come on.

Cross fade to -

Scene 20 - "I'm afraid I have not told you everything..."
Dr Grogan's House

Grogan Now, shall we have something to counteract this damned rain.

Grogan pours them both the brandy.

Mrs Tranter, is she worried? Tell her from me that all is being done that can be done. I have offered five pounds to the man who brings her back... Or finds the poor creature's body.

Charles (*pacing*) She's alive. And I know where she is.

Grogan looks at him in disbelief.

I'm afraid I have not told you everything, Grogan.

Grogan Indeed. Well, I think you better had.

Charles Some days ago, while I was walking on the Undercliff, I encountered Miss Woodruff...

Charles sits.

Sound of thunder and rain drown out his explanation.

Cross fade to -

The Undercliff

Sarah takes refuge from the rain in the old wood ruined cottage.

Cross fade back to Dr Grogan's house -

Charles stands alone looking out, thinking of Sarah.

Grogan, having exited earlier at the end of Charles's explanation, comes back.

Grogan I've sent a boy to catch up with Forsythe and call off the search. Now the girl – you say you know where she is.

Charles Yes... (*he hands Grogan the note*) there's a ruined cottage on the Undercliff...

Grogan (*looking at the written note*) Of course, you cannot go to her. In your situation you cannot risk any further compromise.

Charles (looking down) I do not understand how I allowed myself to become so entangled...

Grogan, seeing his distress –

Grogan Nothing that has been said in this room or remains to be said shall go beyond its walls.

Charles My dear Grogan, that was not necessary.

Grogan Confidence in the practitioner is half of medicine.

Charles And the other half?

Grogan Confidence in the patient... Now – you came for my advice did you not? Very well –

(with purpose) I'm a young woman of superior intelligence and some education. I think the world has done badly by me. I'm not in full command of my emotions. I do foolish things, such as throwing myself at the feet of a handsome Frenchman who is put in my path. What is worse, I have fallen in love with being a victim of fate. I put out a very professional line in the way of melancholy. I have tragic eyes. I weep without explanation, etc etc. And now... Enter a young god. Intelligent. Good-looking. Who, in a spirit of Christian brotherhood, offers to help me escape from my unhappy lot.

Charles makes to interrupt –

(continuing with some urgency) Now, I am very poor. I have but one weapon. The pity I inspire in this kind-hearted man. One day, when I have been walking where I have been forbidden to walk, I seize my chance. I get myself dismissed from my position. I disappear, under the strong presumption that it is in order to throw myself off the nearest cliff-top. And then, in extremis and de profundis – or rather de altis – I cry to my saviour for help. I present what is partly hypothesis, of course.

Charles But your specific accusation – that she invited her own –

Grogan Mrs Fairley was yesterday spying for Mrs Poulteney. The girl walked flagrantly out of the Undercliff right under her nose.

Charles In other words, you are saying she has deceived me.

Grogan I'm saying that girl is ill, she is no malicious schemer. Her despair is a disease.

Charles But she cannot seriously have supposed that someone in my position –

Grogan As a man who is betrothed? I have known many prostitutes. I hasten to add: in pursuance of my own profession not theirs. And I wish I had a guinea for

everyone I have heard gloat over the fact that a majority of their victims are husbands and fathers.

Charles (*confused*) you make her sound like a fiend – she is not so. I cannot believe this of her.

Grogan That, if you will permit a man old enough to be your father to say so, is because you are half in love with her.

Charles I do not permit you to say that. It is highly insulting to Miss Freeman!

Grogan It is indeed, but who is making the insult. Man, man, are we not both believers in science? Do you think in my forty years as a doctor I have not learned to tell when a man is in distress, and because he is hiding the truth from himself? (*pointing to the busts*) Know thyself, Smithson know thyself! Besides, I think I know why that French sailor ran away. He saw she had eyes a man could drown in.

Charles On my most sacred honour, Grogan, nothing improper has passed between us.

Grogan I believe you. But let me put you through the old catechism. Do you wish to hear her? Do you wish to see her? Do you wish to touch her?

Charles turns away.

You are not the first man to doubt his choice of bride.

Charles (*possessed, breaking*) I do not love Miss Woodruff. How could I? ... But... There is something in her... Beneath everything else... A knowing... Something...

Grogan I shall go to the Undercliff in the morning. I shall tell her that you have been unexpectedly called away. And you must go away, Smithson.

Charles What will you do?

Grogan Much depends upon her state of mind. I know a private hospital in Exeter.

Charles An asylum? But she's not mad you cannot lock her away!

Grogan It is conducted in an intelligent and enlightened manner. You would be be prepared for a certain amount of expense?

Charles (*getting up*) Of course, anything to be rid of her – without harm to her... I shall be in debt to you for the rest of my days.

Grogan And let me inscribe the name of your bride upon the bill of credit.

- Charles* Ernestina understands so little of me.
- Grogan* She is – what? – A dozen years younger than yourself. And she has not known you six months. How could she understand you as yet? She is hardly out of the schoolroom.
- Charles* I shall honour the debt.
- Grogan* And give the charming creature time. The best wines take the longest to mature, do they not?
- Charles* I fear that in my own case the same is true of a very inferior vintage.
- Grogan* Bah, poppycock!

Grogan slaps Charles on the shoulder and they shake hands.

Charles goes out into the street.

Sound of thunder overhead now. The Writer watches Charles from the shadows.

Charles stands in the rain from moment unable to return to the hotel.

He then decides to go to Sarah and exits.

Cross fade to –

Scene 21 – "Yes, I am a remarkable person..."

The Undercliff

Sarah is sleeping when Charles enters the cottage.

Rain outside.

- Charles* Ms Woodruff...
- She wakes up, startled.*
- (withdrawing)* oh, forgive me...

Sarah Mr Smithson.

He moves back. He stands a few feet away from her not knowing what to say.

Charles Search parties are out looking for you.

Sarah I did not mean to cause such trouble.

Charles It is clear that you must now leave Lyme...

She bows her head. He steps forward and places his hand on her shoulder.

Do not fear. I come to help you to do that.

*Sarah looks at him passionately.
He withdraws his hand but she catches it and before he can stop her she raises it to her lips.
The dogs of the search party can be heard in the distance.*

Pray control yourself

Sarah I cannot... I have told you a lie, I made sure Mrs Fairley saw me; I knew she would tell Mrs Poulteney.

Charles (*beneath a breaking dam*) But why?

*She looks up at him.
Hypnotised, he reaches out and draws her up to him and they kiss.
Sound of the search party approaching.
He pushes her away–*

No... No!

*He goes outside. Sarah follows him. Sam and Mary are there.
Dogs barking close now.*

What the devil are you doing here? How dare you follow me!

Sam I didn't know, Mr Charles, honest I didn't. I'm with the search party, sir, looking for Miss Woodruff.

Charles (*composing himself*) I have come here on business.

Sam Yes, sir.

Charles At Dr Grogan's request who is treating her. He is fully aware of the circumstances.

Sam Yes, sir.

Charles Which on no account must be disclosed, do you hear?

Sam I understand, Mr Charles.

Charles Does she?

Sam Oh, Mary won't say nothing, Mr Charles. On my life.

Sarah goes back into the cottage.

Charles Very well... And I'll see that's... (*fumbling for his purse*)... Here.

Sam Oh no, Mr Charles... (*taking a step back*)... Never.

Charles (knowing a shrewd sacrifice has been made) As you wish. But not a word.

Sam On my solemnist oath, Mr Charles.

Sound of dogs very near.

Charles Now go. Tell the others to turn back. Dr Grogan has already called off the search. You see she is safe now.

Sam Yes, sir.
(calling out to the search party as he exits) There's nothing here! Let's turn back now... It's getting too dark.

Charles watches him move away. He then goes inside to Sarah.

Charles (quickly) You must forgive me for taking an unpardonable advantage of your unhappy situation. I have behaved foolishly, very foolishly indeed... I think you should go to Exeter. I beg you to take the money in this purse... As a loan, if you wish... Until you can find a suitable position...

Sarah I shall never see you again.

Charles (holding out his purse) Please... Miss Woodruff...

Sarah I accept your loan with gratitude.

She takes the money and bows her head.

Charles (hesitantly) Perhaps it might be wiser not to return to Lyme. If you have the strength you could stay here, walk to Axminster first thing in the morning and take the Exeter coach there.

Sarah That is seven miles away.

Charles I know...

Sarah nods.

The Writer watches them from the shadows.

Writer You are a very remarkable person, Miss Woodruff.

Charles I feel deeply ashamed not to have perceived it earlier.

Sarah (to both) Yes, I am a remarkable person.

*Charles steps forward and holds out his hand.
She hesitates then takes it.*

Charles I shall never forget you.

*He leaves.
Sarah turns to The Writer.*

Sarah Has he gone?

Writer I don't know... I'm not sure of anything any more. I'm sorry, I need time to...
I just need some time...

Lights fade on them both as he sits at his papers.

End of Act One

Act Two

Scene 22 – Arrivals

Sarah in Exeter/Charles in London

Lights up on The Writer - he is at his papers with new purpose. He is drinking whiskey (glass and decanter). He stops, looks out and we hear town noises – a cart in the streets, people. Sarah enters with her shopping. They look at each other. Sarah goes up some stairs to a room in Endicott's hotel, Exeter. The Writer moves centre stage with his glass and decanter and Charles enters. The sound changes to city noise – factories, people, trams, etc. Charles stands downstage, looking out at London. The sounds get louder as Sarah looks down on him. The Writer watches them both then he downs his drink and all sound abruptly ceases. He pours another glass and hands it to Charles.

Writer It's time to forget, Charlie, my boy...

Nat and Tom, Charles's friends at his club, burst in from behind The Writer who expects this and hands them the decanter as they pass him. Then he returns to his corner as the lights go down on Sarah.

Scene 23 – Charlie, my boy!

Charles' Gentleman's Club

Nat and Tom are also smoking.

Nat and Tom CHARLIE, MY BOY!

Nat Charles, my dear man! How the devil are you?

Tom And why the devil are you?

The men laugh drunkenly.

Charles (to himself) Oh God... (to them) Nat, Tom.

It's good to see you back in London, old boy! Let you off the leash, has she?

Tom Out of the matrimonial lock-up?

Charles Parole... you know? The dear girl's down in Dorset, taking the waters.

Tom (pouring him a drink) While you take the spirits, eh? But I hear she's the rose of the season, so young Nat says. He is green, you know. Damned Charlie, he says best girl and best match – ain't fair, is it, Nat?

Nat And how's the esteemed old man, Charles?

Charles He's in the best of health, thank you.

Nat Oh dear, sorry to hear that, old boy. Sure it won't be long though.

The men laugh again.

Tom How goes he for hounds? Ask him if he needs a brace of the best Northumberland. Real angels, though I says it what bread 'em. Tornado – you recall Tornado? His grand pups.

Charles I recall him. So do my ankles.

Tom Ah, he took a fancy to you. Always bit what he loved. Dear old Tornado – God rest his soul.

Nat Indeed, Tom, God rest his soul. But come along, tonight is for the living and you have caught up with us Charles, on a lucky night.

Tom O yes, Charles, dear old fellow, you're a damned lucky fellow.

Nat We're all damned lucky fellows.

Writer *(as Nat and Tom drink)* Come along, drink up and let's be gone.

Charles Where are we going?

Nat Where damned lucky fellows always go for a jolly night. Eh, Tom, ain't that so?

Charles Jolly night?

Tom We going to Ma Tersipchore's, Charles. Worship at the Muse's shrine, don't you know?

Charles Shrine?

Nat So to speak, Charles.

Tom *Metonymia.*

Writer, Tom and Nat *Venus for puella!*

Music.

Cross over to –

Scene 24 – "I've seen better in Paris..."

Ma Tersipchore's

Girls serving their male clients. The Writer moves among them and watches. Ma Tersipchore, a very rouged dame, smoking a cigarette, greets the men.

Ma Gentlemen, lovely to see you all. Welcome. Come in, come in.

*She shows them to their seats.
The atmosphere is bawdy – music, cheering, laughter.*

Tom It's always a pleasure, Ma.

Nat Indeed. This is our good friend, Charles. A true gentleman, Ma.

Ma Well, he's come to the right place then. Haven't you, sir?

Charles (*unsure*) Good...

Tom Is Annie dancing tonight, Ma?

Ma Oh, Mr Tom, she's here, don't you worry. Now, what can I get you?

Nat I think we'll have champers all round, Ma. As usual.

*Ma Tersipchore claps her hands and a young loose-haired girl
in a corset comes across to them.*

Ma This is Charlotte, she'll be serving you tonight.

Tom Will she indeed!

Charlotte Good evening, gentlemen.

The men laugh out loud. Charles embarrassedly looks around.

Ma A bottle of the finest champagne for these gentlemen, Charlotte.

Charlotte bob and moves off.

Enjoy your evening, gentlemen. The show's just about to start. And call out if you need anything.

Ma Terpsichore moves off to check on some other clients.

*The lights go down as the music changes – it is the old vaudeville tune we heard in the prologue
– The Writer recognises it.*

Tom Here we go, Charlie boy. This will beat anything on Shaftesbury Ave, you mark my words.

Charles (*seeing an elderly man*) Good God... Nat, isn't that old... you know?

Nat (*looking across*) Where?... Yes... I believe you're right, Charles... Dirty old bugger!

Tom Damn 'im. He'd better not steal my Annie. I'll kill him.

Nat Well, you better watch out. They prefer the old ones. *(To Charles)* Don't last as long, you see, and will pay through the nose for the girl's silence.

Tom Well, for damn him if he does. I don't care who he is - I'll challenge him.

Nat Very gallant, I'm sure, Tom. Now be quiet, I'm trying to concentrate.

*They watch masked girls dancing and feigning acts of love.
Charles battles with his disgust and his animal excitement.*

Tom Not a bad show, eh Charles? Miss this in Dorset, eh?

Charles *(playing a man of the world)* I've seen better in Paris.

*He sees a red-haired girl and start to think it might be Sarah.
The show gets more raucous as the dancers come among the audience.*

Tom *(seeing a girl take her mask off)* There she is! *(calling out)* Annie! Annie! My dearest, darling beauty!

*But Annie has moved to the older prime catch and dances in front of him.
The old man puts notes into her garter.*

I... Don't believe it... No... She can't...

Nat Nevermind, Tom. Plenty more where that came from.

*Eventually Nat and Tom pair off with two of the dancers.
Charles, now very drunk, watches the red-haired girl leave and follows her.
The Writer finds himself in his way.*

Charles Get out of my way!

Writer Excuse me.

The Writer moves aside and Charles goes outside.

Cross fade to –

Scene 25 – "I can be someone else if you want..."
The Haymarket

*Charles follows the Girl.
He catches up with her and grabs her arm. She turns - it is not Sarah.
The Writer signals for all the others to freeze.*

Charles *(realising his error)* Excuse me... I am sorry...

Girl Thought I was someone else, did you, sir?

Charles Yes... Forgive me.

Girl That's all right, sir. I can be someone else if you want.

Charles No... I don't want that... (*turning*) thank you.

Girl Then I can just be myself, sir...

Charles stops. He turns and looks at her.

Girl It's just as you like.

Charles You have a room?

Girl Yes, sir. Will it be for the night?

Charles Yes.

She goes but he does not follow, reeling and looking at her.

Girl (*turning back*) Terrible cold for the time of year.

Charles Yes... You must notice such things.

Girl I don't do no work out here when it snows. Some does but I don't.

Charles How long have you been...?

Girl Since I was eighteen, sir. Two years come May.

Charles Ah, I see...

Girl (*reassuringly*) I only go with gentlemen, sir. You don't need no worries like that.

Charles Thank you... Very well.

*The Writer dismisses the crowd.
They move inside to –*

Scene 26 - "You like us wicked girls..."

The Girl's room

Charles and the Girl

Charles Do you wish me to pay you now?

Girl I ain't particular, sir. Just as you fancy.

Charles Very well how much?

Girl Normal, sir?

He nods.

All night I usually charges... (*trying her luck*)... A sovereign.

He gives her a coin.

Pardon me, sir. If you'd make yourself at home. I'll just be a minute.

She leaves him. He stands with his back to the fire and takes off his jacket.

There's a few gentle words off. Sound of a baby.

She returns wearing only a peignoir, her hair is loose. She smiles at him

Girl It's my little girl, sir. She won't make no noise. She's as good as gold. Will you take a seat, sir?

Charles sits.

Now I have some wine here if that suits, sir?

She pours a glass of wine and hands it to him.

Charles The father of your little girl?

Girl He's a soldier, sir. He's in India now.

Charles Wouldn't he marry you?

Girl He gave me money when I was brought to bed.

She gets up. He watches her. She then turns the gaslight down – fire light.

Finally she turns to him – a professional about work.

So... Would you like me to sit on your knee now?

Charles Yes... Please do.

She does so and kisses his cheeks. He starts to kiss her neck awkwardly.

Girl No rush now; you can finish your wine first... You're a very handsome gentleman.

Charles Your very pretty girl.

You like us wicked girls?... Here...

*She takes his hand and guides it to her breast.
She then kisses him with an open mouth.
He starts to feel nauseous and breaks the kiss for breath.*

Am I too heavy for you?

Charles No... That is...

She gets up and undoes the rest of the peignoir, letting it slip from her shoulders.

Girl Come on; let's get you out of these.

She reaches out to him and he gets up feeling very unbalanced. She steadies him.

Oops! There you are, darling...

*She kisses him again and starts to move her hands over him.
She begins to undo his trousers.*

Charles I think it would be easier if I did it.

Girl If you like.

Charles *(struggling with his clothes)* Yes.

*Charles stumbles out of his trousers, a ludicrous figure, and goes to her.
Faint echoes of laughter and music from Ma Tersipchore's.*

Girl There... That's better, ain't it?

*She kisses him again, reaching between his legs.
He comes up for air again, the room was spinning.*

Charles I don't even know your name...

Writer Sarah.

Girl Sarah... My name is Sarah.

*A great peal of laughter.
In shock, he stares at her for a moment,
then twists sideways and vomits into the pillow beside her.
Cheering and applause as lights fade.*

*Sam enters and carefully opens a letter, which he begins to read.
The Writer puts on his jacket becoming Grogan and turns out –*

Scene 27 – "You're very sincere, Michael Grogan..."

Grogan's letter

Grogan, Sam and Charles

Grogan My dear Smithson - I have delayed writing to you in the hope of obtaining some clarity about our little Dorset mystery. Miss Woodruff. I regret to say that the only female I encountered on the morning of my excursion to be Undercliff was Mother Nature. I must say I began to fear the worst. However, I think we may take it she has left Lyme. My one remaining fear is that she may follow you to London and attempt to thrust her woes upon you there.

Sam closes the letter again and puts it on a tray with a jug of water. He picks up the tray and moves into Charles's bedroom, waking him and handing him the letter.

Charles, hung-over and still dressed, reads Grogan's letter.

I shall not repeat my advice regarding your charming wife to be, but I recommend a confession at the earliest opportunity. I don't fancy she will require too harsh a penance. You're very sincere, Michael Grogan.

Cross to –

Scene 28 - "I've been thinking of going into business, Mr Charles..."

Charles's house – Kensington

Sam proceeds to clear up

Charles' jacket and tie from the floor.

Charles *(suffering)* Damn you, Sam, must you clatter about like that!

Sam, sulking, does not answer but continues.

Forgive me, Sam. I had a rather tiresome evening at my club last night.

Sam *(handing him another envelope)* There was another note came for you this morning, sir.

Charles opens the envelope.

Sarah enters and speaks out front.

Sarah I am staying at Endicott's Family Hotel, Exeter.

Shocked, Charles screws up the note.

Charles Who brought this?

Sam I don't know, sir. Came separate.

- Charles* Sam, we'll return to Lyme tomorrow. See to everything and then take the afternoon off... Choose some ribbons for Mary – that is if you haven't disposed of your heart elsewhere since you returned.
- Sam* Mr Charles, I'm going to ask for her hand.
- Charles* Are you indeed!
- Sam* Or I would, sir, if it weren't I didn't have such excellent prospects under your employ.
- Charles* Out with it, Sam. Stop talking in riddles.
- Sam* If I was married I'd have to live out, sir.
- Charles* Now, Sam. Heaven forbid that I should be an impediment to your marriage – but surely you're not going to forsake me so soon before mine?
- Sam* You mistake my intention, Mr Charles. I was thinking of afterwards.
- Charles* (*dismissively*) Well, we shall be in a much larger establishment then and I'm sure my wife would be happy to have Mary there with her.
- Sam* I've been thinking of going into business, Mr Charles.
- Charles* What sort of business!
- Sam* Drapers and Haberdashers, Mr Charles.
- Charles* And you've put by enough money to –
- Sam* Alas no, Mr Charles. We'd have to save very hard.
- The penny drops...*
- Charles* How much?
- Sam* I know a shop as I'd like, Mr Charles. He wants a hundred and fifty pounds for the goodwill and a hundred for the stock. And there's thirty pounds rent to be found. It ain't I'm not happy with you, Mr Charles. Only a shop is what I always fancied.
- Charles* How much have you put by?
- Sam* Thirty pounds, sir.
- Charles* And how long has it taken you to save that?

- Sam* Three years, sir.
- Charles* I warn you, Sam, once you take ideas above your station you will have nothing but unhappiness. And besides, I'm used to you - fond of you. I'm damned if I want to lose you. If you marry this girl then, of course, you must have a married man's wages. I shall do handsomely by you, rest assured of that.
- Sam* Yes, Mr Charles.
- Charles* Sam, you mustn't think me ungenerous... That is, I don't want to dash your hopes completely - let me think on it. I shall talk to Mr Freeman; no doubt as a tradesman himself he knows what is to be said for such a venture.
- Sam* Pure gold is how I'd treat any advice from that gentleman, Mr Charles.
- Charles* Very well, now be a good fellow and fetch me up a pot of hot tea. I have the devil's own thirst.
- Sam* Yes, sir.

Lights change.

Scene 28 - "Oh, my love, hurry, hurry!"
Ernestina enters and speaks her letter upfront.

- Ernestina* My dear Charles. How delighted I was to receive your note this morning with the beautiful brooch from Chelsea! You are a darling. I have missed you so and can only report that Lyme has grown ever more tiresome in your absence. You must come and save me from the interminable rounds of visits for tea and supper with Aunt's dreary friends. I shall send this to Exeter so you shall receive it as you alight from the London train. Oh my love, hurry, hurry! Yours truly, Tina.

Sounds of train station.
A guard's call - "Exeter this is Exeter!"

Lights change as we cross over to -

Scene 29 - "Are we staying the night, sir?"
Exeter station

Charles stands reading Ernestina's letter. Sam carries the bags.

- Sam* Are we staying the night, sir?

The Writer tosses a coin as Charles looks at the letter, weighing up the pros and cons of returning to Lyme. The Writer, seeing the result, looks back at Charles.

Charles No... A carriage. A four-wheeler.

Sam Are you sure, sir?

Charles Yes, I'm sure. We're going back to Lyme...
(*more to self*) And I'm going to marry Miss Freeman. Yes you are, Charlie my boy. And we shall beget... What... seven children?

The lights begin to fade on Sam as Charles imagines his future life after this choice.

Dr Grogan will live to be ninety. As will Mrs Tranter, giving us clear proof of the amiability of the fresh air of Lyme. Who else? Ah... Mrs Poulteney will die a few days from now and when she drives up to those heavenly gates in her carriage and demands to take her place at the side of her husband, she will have the door slammed in her face and fall, like a shot crow all the way down to where her true master waits... You, Sam, will marry your Mary and... let me see, what shall become of you – but who really cares what happens to servants? I suppose you will breed and die in the monotonous fashion of your kind.

And Miss Woodruff?... She will linger no doubt in my mind... But I shall never hear of her again... She shall sink out of sight... Drown in the shadows of closer things... But that is how it should be... And I shall die many years from now... Earnestly and dutifully mourning the loss of my beautiful wife some years before... a very old, respected, empty shell of a man...

The Writer tosses the coin again and looks at the results then back at Charles.

Lights change back.

Sam (*oblivious to what Charles has just said*) Mr Charles... Mr Charles... I said, are we staying the night?

Charles (*as waking from a dream*) What?... Yes... I fancy it will rain. We'll put up at The Ship. And I think after that journey I will stretch my legs. Go on with the baggage.

Sam With respect, Mr Charles, I wouldn't. Not with them rain clouds up there about to break.

Charles (*unravelling the note*) A little rain won't hurt me, Sam.

Sam Yes, Mr Charles. Shall I give orders for dinner?

Charles Yes... that is... I'll see when I come in. I may attend evensong at the cathedral.

Charles exits.

Sam whistles to The Writer nearby.

Sam 'Ere. You 'eard of Endicott's Family Hotel?

The Writer is startled at first to be drawn in without planning it.

Writer (unsure) Me?

Sam Yes – you.

Writer (to self) Not you as well...

Sam What?

Writer Nothing... What do you want?

Sam Well, you're a cabbie, ain't yer?

Writer Cabbie?

Sam Yes.

Writer Right... Very well.

(playing along, becoming the cabbie with a strong Devonian accent) Aye.

Sam Well, do you know where Endicott's is?

Cabbie Aye.

Sam Good. Well, you dolly me up to The Ship double-click and you may hear something to your advantage, my man.

They exit together, The Writer carrying the bags.

Cross stage to -

Scene 30 - "You cannot marry me, Miss Smithson..."

Endicott's Hotel

Charles enters and is greeted by Mrs Endicott.

Mrs Endicott A room, sir?

Charles Good evening... No... I... That is. I wish to speak with one of your... A Miss Woodruff?

Mrs Endicott Oh, poor young lady, sir, she was coming downstairs the day before yesterday morning and she slipped, sir. She's turned her ankle something horrible. I wanted to ask the doctor, sir, but she won't hear of it.

Charles Then I cannot see her?

Mrs Endicott Well bless me, you can go up, sir. T'will raise her spirits. You'll be some relative, I dare say?

Charles I have to see her... on a business matter.

Mrs Endicott Ah... A gentlemen of the law?

Charles ...Yes.

Mrs Endicott Then you must go up, sir.

Charles Which room is it?

Mrs Endicott The first one on your left at the top, sir.

Charles goes upstairs.

Cross fade to Sarah sitting by the fire in her room upstairs.

Charles *(from offstage)* Miss Woodruff?

She quickly puts her foot on a stall and covers herself with a shawl.

Sarah Oh, one moment... Please, come in.

He enters. He looks at her – her hair is loose. He stands – awkward.

Mrs Endicott follows him upstairs and listens at the door.

Writer *(to Mrs Endicott)* Psss! Go away.

Mrs Endicott leaves disappointed.

Charles I was passing through Exeter.

(Seeing her injury) Had I not better go at once and fetch a doctor?

Sarah Please, no. He would only advise me to do what I am already doing.

Charles You are not in pain?

Sarah *(shaking her head)* To do such a thing. I cannot understand how I should be so foolish.

Charles At any rate, be thankful that it did not happen on the Undercliff.

Silence.

She looks on the verge of tears.

My dear Miss Woodruff... I should not have come... I meant not to...

She shakes her head and recovers.

Sarah (after a time) I never thought to see you again.

She makes to get up but falls. He catches her. Her hand reaches out to him. Their hands interlace. They look at one another then he moves to her and kisses her passionately.

Charles (breaking the kiss) This is madness...

She strokes his head and they embrace again.

Oh, my dearest Sarah... My dearest.

He picks her up and takes her to the bed.

It is frantic and quick as he frees himself, lifts her nightshirt and enters her.

My sweetest angel... Sarah... Sarah...

Afterwards they both lie there.

*Ernestina, The Writer, Mrs Poulteney, Mrs Tranter,
Mr Forsythe, Sam and the Girl are seen in the shadows watching.
Charles sits up and sees them.*

Charles What is to become of us?

The lights fade on the watchers.

Sarah I cannot think beyond this hour.

Charles I must break my engagement.

Sarah I ask nothing of you. I am to blame.

Charles No, I put all my obligations behind me when I came here.

Sarah I wished it so. I wished it so.

They kiss again.

Charles Sarah... It is the sweetest name.

Sarah I know you cannot marry me.

Charles I must. I want to.

Sarah I am not fit to be your wife.

Charles My dearest –

Sarah Your position, your friends and... Ms Freeman. I know she must love you.

Charles But I no longer love her!

Sarah She is worthy of you. I am not.

Charles You cannot mean that I should go away – as if nothing has happened? You cannot forgive me so much. Or ask so little.

Sarah Why not? If I love you. All I wish for you is your happiness. Now I know there was a day upon which you truly loved me, I can bear... I can bear anything.

They kiss again. He begins to get dressed.

Charles I must go. My manservant is waiting for me. I beg you to give me a day or two's grace. I cannot think now.

As he puts on his shirt, he notices blood - it is Sarah's.

But... Varguennes? ...I am the first?

Sarah I am not worthy of you.

Sarah gets up, moves across the room.

Her ankle is not injured.

Charles Your ankle. Sarah?... Why did you tell me –

Sarah I am not worthy of you! When I went to Weymouth I saw Varguennes with a woman. The kind of woman one doesn't mistake. I waited until they had gone then I walked away.

Charles (*bewildered*) I don't understand...

Sarah Yes, I have deceived you but I shall not trouble you again. You have given me the consolation that in another age, another life, I might have been your wife. You have given me the strength to go on living... In the here and now. There is one thing in which I have not misled you. I loved you... I think from the moment I saw you. What deceived you was my loneliness. A resentment, an envy, I don't know, I don't know.
(*turning away*) Do not ask me to explain what I have done. I cannot.

Charles But you must.

Sarah (*shaking her head*) Please go now. I pray for your happiness, I shall never disturb it again.

He stares at her then finishes dressing himself.

Charles This is my reward. To risk everything... And now to know I was no more than a dupe of your imaginings.

Sarah There can be no happiness for you with me. You cannot marry me, Mr Smithson.

Charles "Mr Smithson"? How can you address me thus? All I ask is to be allowed to understand –

Sarah I beseech you leave!

He turns and leaves her.

Sam is seen watching him leave the hotel from the shadows.

Cross over to -

Scene 31 – "I am so weak..."

Exeter Cathedral

Evensong

Charles kneels, looking out front and speaks as if to his God, his higher self.

The Writer moves forward, not expecting this. Charles has chosen to go to the cathedral himself. The Writer feels a great sympathy for his character's confusion.

Charles (*despairingly*) I don't know how to begin...

Writer Begin with what you have done. And stop wishing you hadn't done it.

Charles I didn't do it. I was led to do it.

Writer But what led you to do it?

Charles I was deceived. I don't know why. If she truly loved me she could not let me go.

Writer If she truly loved you, how could she go on deceiving you?

Charles She gives me no choice. She said herself that marriage between us would be impossible. And Ernestina. My duty is clear. I have given her my solemn promise.

Writer It is already broken.

Charles I will mend it.

Writer With love? Or with guilt.

Charles It doesn't matter which. A vow is sacred.

Writer If it doesn't matter which, then surely the vow cannot be sacred.

Charles I... I cannot go back...

Writer Did you have to meet her again in the Undercliff? Did you have to stay the night in Exeter? Did you have to go to her hotel? I didn't make you do these things –

Charles I know, I know... But she tricked me... Ensnared me.

Writer Then why are you now free of her?

Charles cannot answer.

Perhaps there is one thing she loves more than you. And what you do not understand is that because she truly loves you she must give you the thing she loves more. She means to *unblind* you. You lack the courage to return her gift.

Charles (*breaking down*) But Ernestina -

Writer She will be deceived. Not once, but again and again, every day of your marriage.

Charles puts his head in his hands.

It's up to you now, Charles. Either you stay in this prison; what you call duty, honour, self-respect, and you're comfortable, safe. Or you free yourself and face the world. And its judgement. What will you do?

Charles You don't know?

Writer No.

Charles (*standing*) I must end this... Somehow I must end this.

Charles turns and leaves. The Writer watches him go.

Writer (*to himself*) Indeed... But how?
Endings are always so difficult...

Then cross to –

Scene 32 – "My father will drag your names through the mire!"

Mrs Tranter's House

Ernestina is sitting.

Mary (offstage) Oh, Miss! They've come back, miss!
(entering, excited) They're back! (collecting herself) That is to say, Mr Charles is below, miss.

Ernestina (trying to hide her own excitement) Very well, Mary.

Mary exits smiling.

Ernestina gets up hurriedly, looks at herself in the mirror (she is wearing a new dress). There are sexual thoughts in her head as she feels the line and material. Almost frightened by them she suppresses them and goes to wait at the window.

Charles enters sheepishly.

Ernestina (turning, smiling) I received word this morning you were returning. I have –

Charles does not take her proffered hands.

Charles? Is something wrong? ...Charles?

Charles Please... Sit down.

Ernestina What has happened? Why do you look at me like that?

Charles Because I do not know how to begin to say what I must.

Ernestina What do you mean? What must you say?

Charles The truth.

Ernestina Truth – what truth?

Charles That I have, after many hours of the deepest, the most painful consideration, come to the conclusion that I'm not worthy of you.

Ernestina You are not worthy of me?

Charles No.

Ernestina You are joking.

Charles How little you know of me if you think I could ever joke on such a matter.

- Ernestina* Then kindly explain what you mean.
- Charles* That I cannot do in one sentence.
- Ernestina* Then use several. I shall not interrupt.
- Charles* I have always had, and continue to have the greatest respect and admiration for you. I have never doubted for a moment that you would make an admirable wife to any man fortunate enough to gain your love. But I have also always been shamefully aware that a part of my regard for you was ignoble. I refer to the fortune that you bring – and the fact you are an only child.
- Deep in myself, Ernestina, I have always felt that my life has been without purpose, without achievement. I saw an opportunity, by marriage with you, to re-establish my faith in myself. I did like you very much. I sincerely believed that liking would grow into love.
- Ernestina* This is some nightmare... This is not you... This it is some impostor, some cruel, heartless –
- Charles* I know this must come as the most grievous shock.
- Ernestina* Shock! When you can stand there so cold and collected – and tell me you have never loved me!
- She composes herself.*
- It is because you are marrying into trade. Am I not right?
- Charles* I have fully accepted that... Now let me go on.
- Ernestina* You are breaking my heart.
- Charles* Let us try to cling to that respect we have always had for one another. What haunts me is the injustice I would be doing you – and your father – by marrying you without the love you deserve. If you and I were different people, Ernestina – but we are not. We know by a look, a word, whether our love is returned –
- Ernestina* We thought we knew.
- Charles* I'm convinced, if you search your heart, that faint doubts must have already crossed it.
- Ernestina* *(after a pause)* May I speak now?
- Charles* Of course.

Ernestina I know that to you I have never been anything more than a pretty little article of drawing room furniture. I know that I'm innocent. I know I am spoilt. I know I am not unusual. I know I say things that sometimes grate on your ears, I bore you about domestic arrangements, I hurt you when I make fun of your fossils. Perhaps I am just a child. But under your love and protection... And your education... I believed I should become better. I should learn to please you, I should make you love me for what I had become.

I understand when you talk of your feelings.... I remember, Charles – I will fetch down my diary if you do not believe me – that I wrote, soon after we became engaged, that you had little faith in yourself. I have felt that. You believe yourself a failure, you think yourself despised, I know not what... But that is what I wish to make my real bridal present to you – faith in yourself.

Charles You remind me of how much I lose. Alas, I know myself too well. One cannot resurrect what was never there.

Ernestina (*astounded*) That is all what I say means to you?

Charles It means a great, a very great deal to me.

Ernestina In view of what I have said can you not at least reconsider?

Charles No. I'm afraid not.

Ernestina (*desperate*) Charles, I beg you, I beg you to wait a little. It is true. I'm ignorant, I do not know what you want from it... If you would tell me where I have failed... How you would wish me to be... I will do anything, anything, because I would abandon everything to make you happy.

Charles You must not speak like that.

Ernestina (*she moves to him*) I must – I can't help it – you must not think that because I tease I do not have deeper feelings. I would –

He pulls away from her.

(*realising*) You are lying... Something has happened since you've been away.

Charles I wished to spare you. But – yes something has happened.

Ernestina Who?

Charles Her name is unimportant. You do not know her. I have known her many years. I thought the attachment was broken. I discovered in London... that it is not.

Ernestina You love her?

Charles I do not know... Whatever it is that makes it impossible to offer one's heart freely to another.

Ernestina You... are a monster! I shall bring an action against you. The world shall know you for what you are.

Charles The world will know whatever happens.

Ernestina What woman could be so vile as to make a man break his vows? I can guess she is titled, she is married.

Charles I will not discuss this.

Ernestina Where is she now? Waiting for you in London?

Charles stares at her then turns to leave.

My father will drag your name, both your names through the mire! You will be spurned and detested by all who know you. You will be hounded out of England, you will be –

She falls in a faint to the floor. Charles starts to go to her, then draws back.

Charles Mary!

Mary arrives quickly.

She has had a shock. You must on no account leave her. I will fetch Dr Grogan.

*This again comes as a surprise to The Writer,
who quickly grabs his jacket and gets ready as Grogan.*

Mary (with contempt) I'll see to her, sir. Don't you worry yourself no more.

*Charles turns and leaves.
He goes straight to –*

Scene 33 – "She is not what you think, Grogan..."
Dr Grogan's House

Grogan This is a surprise. I did not expect to see you –

Charles I have broken off my engagement. Ms Freeman is very distressed. I beg you not to ask explanation and go to Broad Street without delay.

Grogan puts down his book and silently goes to his medical bag.

Grogan I trust this has nothing to do with Miss Woodruff.

Charles nods. The doctor is shocked but, after a pause, continues to check his bag and get his hat and coat.

Charles She is not what you think, Grogan. I'm certain of that.

Grogan I need to ascertain, for medical purposes you understand, does Mr Freeman know?

Charles That there is another... no more. I must ask you not to reveal her name. For Miss Woodruff's sake. Not mine.

Grogan Might I understand that that night –.

Charles In heaven's sake man, you are a doctor. Miss Freeman requires assistance. Go now!

Grogan stares at him then makes to go.

Forgive me, Grogan... I have not slept... You must understand... I did not reject your advice without much consideration.

Grogan Smithson, a gentleman remains a gentleman when he rejects advice. He does not do so when he lies.

Charles I believed it necessary.

Grogan As you believed the satisfaction of your lust necessary?

Charles I will not accept that world.

Grogan Oh, you had better learn to, my boy. The world will soon attach it to your conduct, believe me.

Charles (*desperate*) Good God man, what would you have me do? Live a life of pretence? Huh, of hypocrisy?

Grogan I would have you think twice before you embroiled that innocent girl in your pursuit of self-knowledge. You will marry the other?

Charles Yes... That is my most sincere intent.

Grogan puts on his coat.

Grogan I will see to Ms Freeman now. I believe she will survive...

Smithson, I warn you a doubt must remain over Miss Woodruff's extraordinary behaviour. I fear the question of who she really is may yet cast a shadow over any future you have together.

Charles I have taken that into consideration – as I have also taken into account the obfuscating cant our sex talks about women. They are to sit, are they not, like so many items in a shop and we point at this one or that one – she takes my fancy. If they allow this, we call them decent, respectable, modest. But when one of these items has the impertinence to speak up for herself –

Grogan She has done rather more than that, I gather.

Charles She has done what is almost commonplace in high society. I am far more to blame. She merely sent me her address. I was perfectly free to avoid the consequences of going to it.

Grogan Indeed you were free... And do you believe yourself so now?

Charles cannot answer.

I will say only this. If you become a better and more generous human being after this, you may be forgiven. If not... You are damned.

Charles I know.

Grogan (*offering his hand*) I wish you well on your march away from the Rubicon.

Charles takes his hand.

And now if you do not leave Lyme within the hour I shall be back with the largest horsewhip I can find.

Charles turns and goes to his rooms.

Scene 34 – never true, Mr Charles?

The White Lion Hotel

Charles enters and gets himself a brandy.

Charles (*calling*) Sam... Sam ?

Sam (*entering*) it's never true, Mr Charles?

Charles Yes, it is true. Ms Freeman and I are no longer to marry. Now, get everything ready. We leaving Lyme for good.

Sam But, Mr Charles –

Charles Oh, and you delivered that letter I left with you in Exeter?

- Sam* (lying) Of course, sir.
- Charles* To Endicott's hotel?
- Sam* Yes, Mr Charles.
- Charles* And was there was a reply?
- Sam* No reply, Mr Charles.
- Charles* (considers this) Very well... Now hurry.
- Sam* But, sir... me and my Mary...
- Charles* (turning from him) Later, later. I cannot think of such matters now.
- Sam* With respect, I have to think of my own situation.
- Charles* (turning back) And what may that mean?
- Sam* Will you be residing in London from henceforward, sir?
- Charles* What? I don't know... I shall very probably go abroad.
- Sam* Then I have to advise you, sir, that I won't be accompanying you.
- Charles* How dare you address me in that damned impertinent manner! Get out!
- Sam* Not 'fore you've heard what I've got to say... I ain't going back to Exeter with you. I ain't serving that woman I'm leaving your employ! As I ought to have done long ago.
- Charles* Go to the devil!
- Sam* I don't fancy nowhere, *sir*, as where I might meet a friend of yours. If you wishes for attention, pray ring for one of the hotel domestics!
- Sam exits.*
- Charles* Sam! Come back here! Sam!

Charles is left speechless

Cross to –

Scene 35 - "I don't ever want to leave thee ma,am..."
Mrs Tranter's house

Mrs Tranter and Mary

- Mary* I'm sorry, ma'am. Miss Tina – it's not my fault, ma'am, Miss Tina –
- Mrs Tranter* Just tell me what happened, child.
- Mary* (*frantically*) Mr Charles called down, ma'am, and Miss Tina was lying in faints and he ran out for the doctor and Miss Tina her opens her eyes, only her don't say nothing so as I helps her up here, I didn't know how to do, for soon's her's her bed, ma'am, her's taken by the hysterics and, I was so frightened, 'twas like her was laffin' and screamin' and her wouldn't stop. And then Dr Grogan he come and he calmed her down. Oh ma'am...
- Mrs Tranter* (*taking her in her arms*) There, there, Mary, you are a good girl, you mustn't cry.
- Mary* (*sobbing*) but Sam, ma'am. He's had bad words with Mr Charles, ma'am, and given in his notice and Mr Charles won't give him no reffrums now. Us don't know what's to become of us.
- Mrs Tranter* This Sam, do you truly love him?
- Mary* Yes, m'm.
- Mrs Tranter* Does he love you?
- Mary* Is why he wouldn't go with his master, ma'am.
- Mrs Tranter* Then we shall find him a post, Mary.
- Mary* (*looking up at her*) I don't ever want to leave thee, ma'am.
- Mrs Tranter* And you never shall, child... till your wedding day. Now, run along.

Mrs Tranter kisses Mary's forehead.

Cross fade to -

Scene 36 – "The young lady's left, sir..."
Endicott's hotel, Exeter

Charles and Mrs Endicott

- Mrs Endicott* (*coming in*) Oh, it's you, sir.
- Charles* (*moving past*) Ms Woodruff expects me. I'll find my own way.
- Mrs Endicott* The young lady's left, sir.
- Charles* Left? You mean gone out?

- Mrs Endicott* No, sir. I mean left. She took the London train early this morning, sir.
- Charles* But I... Are you sure?
- Mrs Endicott* As sure as I'm standing here, sir. I distinctly heard her say the railway station to the man, sir. And he asked what train, and she said, plain as I'm speaking to you now, the London. Well, I was surprised myself, sir. With three days still paid on her room.
- Charles* Did she leave no address?
- Mrs Endicott* Not a line, sir. Not a word to me where she was going.
- Charles* And no message... no message was left for me?
- Mrs Endicott* I thought it might be very likely you she was going off with, sir. That's what I took the liberty to presume.
- Charles* Here's my card. If you hear from her – if you would let me know. Without fail. *(He gives us a money)* Here, something for the postage.
- Mrs Endicott* *(it is far too much)* Thank you, sir. Without fail.

Charles turns to go then remembers –

- Charles* This morning – my manservant, he came with a letter from this Woodruff? Shortly after 8 o'clock?
- Mrs Endicott* It's been very quiet today, sir... I would have remembered, I'm sure.
- Charles* *(under his breath)* Damn you, Sam!

Charles leaves abruptly.

Scene 37 – The Train

Train journey to London

Charles takes a seat in a train carriage and looks pensive.

The Writer sits opposite him with a newspaper and watches Charles as they travel. As Charles looks out of the train, we see his thoughts – the detectives he has hired to search London for Sarah. They go from house to house asking questions and giving out leaflets in search of Sarah.

- Detective 1* Miss Sarah Woodruff!
- Detective 2* Have you seen this woman? Miss Sarah Woodruff?
- Detective 1* If you see her or hear of her then contact this address.

- Detective 3* Sarah Woodruff! Ask around – there's money in it.
- Detective 2* There's a reward of fifty pounds for information that leads to her whereabouts.
- Detective 1* Woodruff! Do you recognise her?
- Detective 3* Fifty pounds, you hear?
- Detective 2* We're looking for a Miss Sarah Woodruff!
- Detective 3* Contact Nathaniel Montague Esquire, if you see or hear anything of her.

*They leave and we focus back on the train. Charles becomes disconcerted by The Writer – not knowing who he is at all but seeing him as a rather rude passenger.
Sound of a train whistle as the train comes to a stop.*

Station announcement All change!

Charles and The Writer alight.

Cross to –

Scene 38 - "It is a confessio delicti..."

Montague's office

*Charles sits in his lawyer's office, Nathaniel Montague, the friend from his club.
Nat passes him paper.*

- Charles* What is this then, Nat?
- Nat* That is your medicine, dear boy. As prescribed by Mr Freeman. You've got to take it. It is a confessio delicti, Charles.
- Charles* A statement of my guilt?
- Nat* Just so. An ugly document, I'm afraid but I can only advise you to sign it. You have no case.
- Charles* (*reading*) "I entered upon a clandestine liaison with one Sarah Woodruff and I did attempt to conceal this liaison." How do they know it was Miss Woodruff?
- Nat* It seems that bastard servant of yours informed them and thereby secured himself employment with Mr Freeman.
- Charles* Sam... My God. Have you no on it?
- Nat* I fancy that there must have been some dispute over the drafting. No lawyer would happily have put in that sixth clause.

- Charles* (reading) "My conduct throughout this breach of contract has been dishonourable, and by it I have forever forfeited the right to be considered a gentleman."
- Nat* If it came to court, one might well argue that no gentleman, however foolish he had been, would make such an admission except under duress. It is really in our favour. My guess is that it is Papa's clause. He wants you to eat humble pie.
- Charles* It is vile.
- Nat* The law is not concerned with truth, Charles.
- Charles* So I must sign.
- Nat* If you like, I can go back and argue for different phrasing... But I strongly advise against it. The very harshness of this would argue far better for you.
- Charles* (melodramatically) I am defiled to the end of my life
- Nat* My dear Charles, I am as fond as the next man of a pretty ankle, you know that, eh? But don't tell me that the price is not fairly marked.
- Charles* I wish I were dead
- He signs the document and passes it back.*
- And what of the other matter?
- Nat* No word, I'm afraid.
- Charles* What? Nothing?
- Nat* Charles, I have three private detectives working for you. We have placed advertisements in four newspapers every day for the past three months and still we have heard nothing. I fear she is not to be found in London, or –
- Charles* Or?
- Nat* Or she does not wish to be found.
- Charles* I cannot believe that.
- Nat* Then she must be elsewhere. Although, as you know we have searched Exeter and much of Dorset and Devon to no avail.
- Charles* (getting up) I cannot understand it.

Nat Forgive me, Charles, but the strong presumption must be that... Could not the good doctor have been right? Can you be so sure of her motives? She did deceive you... with her stories and actions. Perhaps she wished it to be thus, to reduce you to what you are.

Charles (after a pause) No I cannot believe that.

Nat (*giving up*) Then perhaps she is dead.

Charles turns to look at him.

I will send a clerk to look at the Registry of Deaths. And if you will allow me... I would suggest you go abroad. Go on and hunt for your precious fossils somewhere and let this business with Miss Freeman die down. It will save some embarrassment at least. And you need not worry, I shall send you word whenever I hear any news of Miss Woodruff. What do you say? Leave this place.

Charles smiles wryly.

What's so funny?

Charles In another life, I once offered someone that same advice. Yes, Nat, I think you're right. I shall. I have always wished to see America.

Nat America? Are you serious?

Charles Yes.

Nat Well, I must say... Although...

Charles What?

Nat Well, by the by, I'm sure it must have crossed your mind that she may be there? I hear that these cheap passage ships are full of young women in search of a husband - or new life of some sort.

Charles No, I hadn't thought of that... To tell you the truth, I have tried not to think of her at all these last few days. I've given up any hope.

Nat Then go to America. Drown your sorrows on the bosom of some charming Pocahontas. I hear wellborn English gentleman can have the pick of some very beautiful young women - if he so inclines.

Cross fade to -

Scene 39 – Travel

A montage of sound and action as time passes and Charles travels through Europe and America haunted by images of the missing Sarah (who should remain noticeably absent throughout).

Sound-scape: echoes of the prologue (city noises, trains, ship whistles, horse, seagulls, etc.).

*Once again we see and hear the characters,
this time in Charles's mind as he meditates on the past.*

Charles (calling out as at the start) Madam!... Madam!

Girl I shall never forget you.

Ernestina It must have been poor "Tragedy".

Mrs Tranter She is a very unfortunate girl.

Sam Miss Woodruff to see you, sir.

Ernestina The fishermen have a gross name for her –

Girl They call her –

Ernestina The French Lieutenant's Woman.

Girl You have travelled, you are educated –

Ernestina You are a gentleman.

Sam She has brought the things you asked for, sir.

Mrs Poulteney Standards must be upheld.

Ernestina I am a remarkable person.

Girl You like us wicked girls.

Nat I'm as fond as the next man of a pretty ankle.

Sam We staying the night, sir?

Ernestina Am I too heavy for you?

Nat But don't tell me the price is not fairly marked.

Girl Oh, Charles, what wickedness.

Ernestina I gave myself to him.

Mrs Tranter A foreign officer.

Ernestina I can be someone else if you'd like.

Mrs Poultney The kind of woman one does not mistake.

Sam I'm not serving that woman!

Mrs Poultney Whore!

Ernestina The French Lieutenant's whore!

Sam I don't fancy nowhere where's I might meet a friend of yours!

Ernestina I beseech you leave!

Nat Go to America!

Charles (*putting his head in his hands in despair*) Sarah.

Atmosphere changes – American characters come on.

Charles turns up stage to look at them.

Mother Will you join us, Mr Smithson? It's such a beautiful morning. Can we tempt you to some refreshment?

Daughter Oh, yes do come and join us, sir. We would be delighted to hear more of your travels.

Charles (*sitting with them*) Thank you.

Mother You must forgive our forwardness, Mr Smithson, I'm sure it's not what you're used to. You see, in general we say what we think in this country. My impression of London from my time there is heaven help you if you don't say what you don't think! Ha ha!

Charles I must confess I do find your honesty and directness here very... refreshing.

Daughter I told you, mama!

Mother Oh Charles, Catherine was just saying this morning that she thought you were enjoying your stay in our country. I wasn't so sure. But Catherine has a talent for seeing through to the real person, so to speak.

Charles Indeed I am enjoying my stay, madam.

Daughter So where else have you been, Charles? We so loved your tales of Paris.

Charles Well, as you know I spent some time in France before I visited Italy and then on to Spain.

Daughter (*in awe*) Really? How truly wonderful.

Mother Oh my! What a trip! How long have you been going, Charles?

Charles Uhm... Eight months in all, I believe.

Mother Well, that is wonderful. I envy you, Charles, I really do. Spain? Did you hear that, dear – he's seen Spain!

Daughter And when are you thinking of returning home, Charles?

Charles I'm not sure actually. At this moment, I have no plans as such.

Servant enters holding a telegram.

Daughter Well, we would be very happy to see more of you while you are here, Charles. Wouldn't we, mama? Please, you must allow us to show you around.

Servant Excuse me ladies. Mr Smithson, there's a telegram for you.

Daughter I'm sure daddy would love to meet Charles, mama. We could take him out to the estate and introduce into the real American way of life.

Mother Why that's an excellent idea, Catherine. What do you say, Charles?

Charles opens the telegram and is stunned by it.

Daughter What is it, Charles?

Charles (*to himself*) She is found...

Daughter What's that, Charles?

Charles You must forgive me but...

Mother Is it bad news, Charles?

Charles I have to... Please forgive me... But I must return to London.

An eerie sound builds to a climax as the lights change and we are back to where we started with an empty stage, The Writer and his two characters...

Scene 40 – Endings
Cheyne Walk, London

Charles and Sarah stand facing each other.

Sarah How came you here Mr Smithson?

Charles My solicitor has told you lived here... Did you not know that I have been looking for you?

Sarah looks down.

I see you are well established. This is a fine place.

Sarah Life has been kind to me.

Charles You work here?

Sarah Yes.

Charles As a governess?

Sarah No. The master of the house has no children. He is not married.

Charles I see. Then you are...?

Sarah I serve as his assistant. He is an artist. A very great one, I believe.

Charles starts again.

Charles The last time we met... In Exeter. I left under the impression that you knew I would return to you. There were things that needed to be done first. I sent my manservant to deliver a message to you the following morning. However, he betrayed me so when I returned to Exeter, having broken off my engagement with Miss Freeman, you were gone without explanation. I have searched everywhere for you since that day –

He stops unable to go on.

What I say means nothing to you?

Sarah It means very much to me.

Charles I beg you to continue.

Sarah I'm at a loss for words

Charles You gave me the greatest proof a woman can that... that what possessed us was no ordinary degree of mutual sympathy and attraction.

Sarah I do not deny that.

Charles Then why did you not wait for me?

Sarah I did not think to ever see you again.

Charles That does not answer my question.

Sarah I have forbidden myself to regret the impossible.

Charles I do not know how to interpret your very evident embarrassment of seeing me again. *(smiling bitterly)* It seems now it is I who have become the outcast.

Sarah I did not mean to make you so. I meant to do what was best. I had abused your trust, your generosity. I had thrown myself at you. A madness was in me at that time. The worst you thought of me then was nothing but the truth. I believe I was right to destroy what had begun between us. There was a falsehood in it.

Charles I was not to blame for that.

Sarah No, you were not to blame.

Charles Then what you are saying is that you never loved me.

Sarah I could not say that.

Charles But you must! You must say I was totally evil, I never saw in him other than an instrument I could use. For now I don't care that he still loves me, that in all his travels he has not seen a woman to compare with me, that he is a ghost, a shadow of his former self. You must say, I do not care that his only crime was to have shown a few hours indecision...

*He breaks off here, unable to continue in this way –
perilously near tears, he cannot meet her eyes.*

It does not matter... Nothing matters any more except... Sarah; I have not passed a single moment in the last year without thinking of this conversation... Sarah...

He reaches out and takes a hand. She takes it away.

There is another.

Sarah Yes.

Furious, Charles turns to go.

I beg you there is something I must say.

Charles *(turning back)* You have said the one thing that matters.

Sarah Mr Smithson, I have changed! I am happy. I cannot wish my life other than it is now. There is another in my life – but the other is not what you think. I'm no man's mistress. I do not wish to marry. I do not wish to share my life.

Charles (*desperate*) That is what I am trying to say. I too have changed. I have learned much of myself. I make no conditions. All that Miss Sarah Woodruff is, Mrs Charles Smithson may continue to be. I offer no more than an enlargement of your happiness.

Sarah You are very kind but you do not understand. It is not your fault. I'm not to be understood – even by myself.

Charles But... I want to understand, Sarah... I need to understand. You must... Who are you? Have you not... Have you not thought of me since?

Sarah I thought much of you to begin with. I thought much of you some six months later, when I first saw one of the notices you had put in the newspaper –

Charles Then you did know!

Sarah I made enquiries. I knew then, not before, that you had not married.

Charles Then you have not only ruined my life. You have taken pleasure in doing so.

Sarah I knew nothing but unhappiness could come from our meeting again.

Charles I think you lie. I think you revelled in the thought of my misery. You forget I already know, to my cost, what an accomplished actress you can be when it suits your purpose.

The clock chimes...

Sarah You misjudge me.

Charles No. You have not only planted the dagger in my breast, you have delighted in twisting it.

He turns and goes to leave.

Sarah Mr Smithson!

*He stops but he does not turn.
Sarah hesitates.*

Writer Go on, tell him. Please!

Sarah (*finally*) I cannot let you go believing that. I have found new affections but they are not of the kind you suggest. There is a lady in this house who

knows me, who understands me. She will explain... My real nature, who I truly am, far better than I can myself.

Charles (turning) I'm astounded that you should think a stranger to me could extenuate your behaviour.

Sarah Please... I beg you, Charles.

Charles What I to understand by this?

Sarah signals and a woman enters with a baby she passes to Sarah.

Sarah What a less honourable gentleman would have understood some time ago. Come and meet her and accord her the respect due to her situation and her age.

Sarah hands Charles the baby. Charles looks at her – she is his.

Charles I do not understand... When was she?... How old is she?

Sarah Ten weeks.

Charles Then... She is mine.

Sarah smiles at him.

But why? What if I had never come?

Sarah It had to be so.

Charles And all those things you said... Forced me to say?

Sarah Had to be spoken.

She leans forward and kisses him.

Charles (looking at her) Shall I ever understand you?

They embrace.

Writer Thank you...

The Writer sits satisfied with his ending.

Sarah No... No.

*Sarah hands the baby back to the servant.
The Writer stands, shocked by Sarah's changing of his plot.*

Writer What are you doing?

Sarah I cannot do what you want. It would not happen.

Writer Yes, it would! It's the natural ending.

Sarah No! You will not put lies in my mouth or bend me to that which I am not. Have you learnt nothing?

Writer But it works! (*he holds up some papers*) You embrace and we see you together at last – as equals.

The clock chimes are heard again.

Sarah (*to The Writer*) You misjudge me.

Sarah turns to Charles.

The lights change back –

Charles (*as before*) No. You have not only planted the dagger in my breast, you have delighted in twisting it.

He turns and goes to leave.

Sarah Mr Smithson!

He stops but does not turn.

Is this not proof of what I said just now? That we had better never to set eyes on each other again?

The Writer is startled by Sarah's change.

She waits the Charles's response

Eventually Charles turns.

Charles Your logic assumes that I knew your real nature. I did not.

Sarah Are you sure?

Charles I thought your mistress in Lyme a selfish and bigoted woman. I now perceive she was a saint compared to her secretary.

Sarah And I should not be selfish if I said, knowing I cannot love you as a wife must, you may marry me?

Charles I have sacrificed everything; my good name, my honour, my life. You have manipulated me and finally destroyed me. Have you nothing to say? Well, Miss Woodruff, what do you suggest I do?

Sarah Surely, Mr Smithson, you can see.

Charles No, I do not, Miss Woodruff. Tell me!

Sarah You are now free to do as you wish.

Charles I do not – I cannot understand your riddles anymore! The day will come when you shall be called to account for what you have done to me. And if there is justice in heaven your punishment shall outlast eternity!

He leaves the room and stops outside in the street.

The Writer and Sarah watch him go.

Writer This is your ending? I don't understand...

Sarah You may use your ending if you wish. But look...

The Writer looks at Charles.

A sense of calm, of realisation, of freedom comes over Charles now as he looks out to his future.

Sarah exits.

Writer Charles?

Charles slowly turns away from the Writer and also exits.

The Writer, alone now, moves to his papers and picks up his final page.

He picks up his pen and begins to write.

The sound of the distant buoy-bell.

Lights fade to black.

The End