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BOOK OF DAYS

A play based on true events

By John Chambers

Characters:

Sabrina, 12 – a “foundling” from Shropshire

Lucretia, 13 – a “foundling” from the East End

Thomas Day – 21, educated

Richard Edgeworth – mid twenties, an Irish “gentleman”

John Bicknell – early 20s, educated

Anna Seward – mid twenties, educated

The following can be played by the above:

Matron – Irish

Physician

Mrs Gridgrand – a cockney housekeeper

French Officer – speaks English well

French Maid – who hardly speaks at all

NB. Lucretia and Sabrina will appear briefly as woman in their 30s.

Settings:

1769-7 – England and France. 1789 – England.

Essentially an open space that can represent - drawing rooms; sparse children's bedrooms; possibly a veranda onto a garden; the open Peak District Moors.

PROLOGUE. 1769.

A FOUNDLING HOSPITAL. SHREWSBURY.

DARKNESS.

THOMAS: (UNSEEN) Illusive visions! Oh not here, – not here
Does spring eternal hold her placid reign
Already Boreas chills the altered year
And blasts the purple daughters of the plain
So fade my promised joys! – fair scenes of blush
Ideal scenes, too long believed in vain
Plunged down and swallow'd deep in Times abyss
So veering Chance and ruthless Fates ordain.

SPOT UP ON AN EMPTY SPACE.

PHYSICIAN: (UNSEEN, SHOUTS) Come you little wretch come – there's a gentleman waiting. (BEAT) Come.

THOMAS & PHYSICIAN ENTER IN SILHOUETTE AND WAIT.
THE GIRL WHO IS TO BE SABRINA ENTERS. SHE IS 12 YEARS OF AGE,
HAS LONG BROWN HAIR AND WEARS A SIMPLE SMOCK. SHE IS
EXTREMELY NERVOUS.

PHYSICIAN: What do you think, sir?

THOMAS: May I take a closer look?

THOMAS GOES TO SABRINA. A MOMENT THEN HE TOUCHES HER
HAIR. SHE FLINCHES.

PHYSICIAN: Hold still, girl.

THOMAS: I won't hurt you... Fine tresses... chestnut.

PHYSICIAN: Auburn, my wife tells me. But clean. If the unfortunates who come into our care have nothing else they have cleanliness – and Godliness.

THOMAS: But not much learning.

PHYSICIAN: They learn right from wrong, sir. Right from wrong. Quite enough for someone no-one else in the world wants. They wouldn't be here if anyone did. Cleanliness, Godliness – and gratitude. And if they don't they'll pay the price, sir. Pay the price.

THOMAS: Perfect.

PHYSICIAN: Thank you, sir. I thought you were criticising. (BEAT) Will she do for you?

THOMAS SCRUTINIZES SABRINA CLOSELY.

THOMAS: Fine long lashes... skin as smooth and clear as...

PHYSICIAN: I attribute it to the turnip broth and porridge. Plain but nourishing.

THOMAS: As it should be.

PHYSICIAN: As it should be indeed.

THOMAS: Does she speak?

PHYSICIAN: Talk to the master, girl.

BEAT.

SABRINA: My name is...

THOMAS: (CUTS IN) I don't want to know your given name.

PHYSICIAN: It's as well – their parents give 'em one, we give em another...

THOMAS: (CUTS IN) And I shall give her another.

PHYSICIAN: That would be your prerogative.

THOMAS: Good.

PHYSICIAN: Ah hum... (BEAT) Now I can tell you're a gentleman..

THOMAS: I have sufficient independent means to support my mother and her new husband...

PHYSICIAN: So, you intend taking the girl to be a servant for your family?

SABRINA: I'd be a very dutiful servant, sir.

THOMAS: For me.

PHYSICIAN: Oh.

THOMAS: She has a melodious voice.

PHYSICIAN: Does she?

THOMAS: I'll take her.

BEAT.

PHYSICIAN: But you are young...

THOMAS: Twenty one... and a gentleman.

PHYSICIAN: And married, I dare say.

THOMAS: No. I'll take her.

PHYSICIAN: It doesn't seem entirely right and proper.

THOMAS: Why on earth not?

PHYSICIAN: Well sir, we all know what gentlemen get up to – you being a gentleman yourself.

THOMAS: (VEHEMENT) Not I, sir. Not I, whatever you might imply. Here (HE FINDS SOME DOCUMENTS FROM HIS POCKET) Here – read this, sir. Read this. A testimonial.

PHYSICIAN: (PERUSES DOCUMENT) From John Bicknell, Esquire. A gentleman?

THOMAS: Training in the law. We attended Charterhouse together.

PHYSICIAN: Charterhouse – a school for gentlemen.

THOMAS: Some might say, sir.

PHYSICIAN: I do say – floggings a-plenty too I dare say, sir.

THOMAS: Floggings a-plenty.

PHYSICIAN: Mr John Bicknell affirms that you are a character of good character, Mr Day. A man of independent means. A gentleman.

THOMAS: The words of a gentleman.

PHYSICIAN: Take the child, Mr Day. Take her and do as you think fit.

THOMAS: Collect your belongings, child.

SABRINA LOOKS TOWARDS PHYSICIAN WHO LAUGHS.

PHYSICIAN: Belongings the child don't possess, sir. Clean hair of an auburn hue, skin like marble and soft eyes is all she do possess – but that's more than most in her situation...

THOMAS: Find her a shawl - it will be chill on the coach to London.

SABRINA: London!

PHYSICIAN: Yes, London, girl – it is even grander than Shrewsbury they do say.

ALL EXIT.
BLACKOUT THEN A SPOT.
A YOUNG GIRL, CROPPED TOUSLED FAIR HAIR, WEARING A SHABBY INSTITUTIONAL SHIFT, ENTERS. SHE'S FIDGETY MORE THAN NERVOUS. THIS IS THE GIRL WHO WILL BECOME LUCRETIA. UNSEEN AN IRISH MATRON SCREECHES AT HER.

MATRON: (UNSEEN) Cease fidgeting you little..., fidget.

THOMAS & EDGEWORTH ARE SHOWN IN BY THE ILL-TEMPERED
MATRON. ALL IN SILHOUETTE.

MATRON: What d'you think of this one – seein' as you wasn't impressed by the other baker's dozen I've already set before you (COLLECTS HERSELF) Sirs?

EDGEWORTH: Mr Day has made a substantial donation to hospital funds.

MATRON: Mr Day would have to pay as much for a slave in Jamaica I believe

LUCRETIA: I ain't no slave!

MATRON: (CLIPS HER) Quiet.

LUCRETIA: Well, I ain't. Slaves is black as old Nick's arse-hole.

MATRON CLIPS HER AGAIN BUT EDGEWORTH LAUGHS.

EDGEWORTH: She's lively enough.

THOMAS: Is lively what I'm looking for, Richard?

EDGEWORTH: A colt to be broken...

LUCRETIA TROTS ROUND LIKE A HORSE, WHINNYING.

MATRON: What the devil are you doing?

LUCRETIA: I'm a horse.

MATRON: Maybe the gentleman should take a horsewhip to you?

EDGEWORTH: Mr Day doesn't believe in chastisement – not even of horses.

MATRON: (ASIDE) So long as he doesn't intend riding her.

THOMAS: (TO LUCRETIA) Have you had schooling?

THE MATRON GOES INTO PAROXYSMS OF LAUGHTER.

THOMAS: Madam, I am here in earnest!

MATRON: (UNSEEN) Oh I dare say, sir. But what would such a girl need of education? Any girl come to that. I mean. My achievements in that direction allow me to write my name – after a fashion, and I know how many beans make five. If she's going to be a skivvy she'll have no need for reading and writing. And if you've got what I think in mind for her she won't neither.

THOMAS: And what might that be, madam?

MATRON: That's for you to know and me to surmise. Let me put it this way – I dare say you want to employ her as what is known in polite company as an "actress". Not the kind who'll need to read any lines but will take direction.

EDGEWORTH LAUGHS.

MATRON: I am surmising, sir, merely surmising. But seeing as how you've made a generous donation to our institution I'm not one to jib.

LUCRETIA SCRATCHES HER BOTTOM.

MATRON: (CUFF HER) Don't do that in company.

LUCRETIA: Sorry, Matron, but my arse itches something wicked.

MATRON: (CUFFS HER) Don't say "arse". Beg your pardon, sirs.

THOMAS: What's the matter with her?

MATRON: It's only worms.

THOMAS CRINGES.

MATRON: I told the Board of Governors it was a mistake giving them boiled pork – even if it is only once a month. A mug of brine'll soon dislodge them though. (BEAT) So will you take her – we're scraping the bottom of the barrel – all I've got left is cripples - oh and a good few imbeciles who'd scrub up nicely and might suit your purposes.

EDGEWORTH: Take the girl, Tommy. She's got spirit.

BEAT.

THOMAS: (TO MATRON) You will without delay, sign indenture forms regarding the child in favour of Mr Richard Lovell Edgeworth here. (TO EDGEWORTH) It's very noble of you to do this for me, Richard.

MATRON EXITS.

EDGEWORTH: Think nothing of it, my boy – now you've got a pair of 'em.

THOMAS CONSIDERS LUCRETIA FOR A MOMENT, THEN LEAVES WITH EDGEWORTH.

SHE IS LEFT ALONE. SHE GNAWS HER KNUCKLES.
BLACKOUT.

ACT ONE SCENE 1

LONDON. EVENING. A MIDDLE-CLASS HOUSE. ONE AREA IS A SPARTAN CHILDREN'S BEDROOM – SIMPLY TWO SMALL SINGLE BEDS. THE ROOM WILL HAVE A WINDOW OVER-LOOKING BUSTLING CHANCERY LANE. ANOTHER AREA WILL REPRESENT A DRAWING ROOM IN THE SAME HOUSE.
THE BEDROOM.

LUCRETIA: You talks funny.

SABRINA: The gentleman says I talks nice.

LUCRETIA: Did he... Yes, well he says I talks nicer than anyone he's ever heard talking...

SABRINA PUT OUT.

LUCRETIA: ...as a matter of fact he says he's so very highly delighted by the way I talks he's given me my own very special name – "Lucretia".

SABRINA: He's given me my own very special name too.

LUCRETIA: No he hasn't.

SABRINA: "Sabrina".

LUCRETIA: What sort of name's that when you're out?

SABRINA: Sabrina Sydney.

LUCRETIA: "Sidney"? That's a chap's name. Or a boy's. When I was in a spike once there was a youth called "Sidney". He used to be for ever playing with his priapus.

SABRINA: His what?

LUCRETIA: His (INDICATES)

SABRINA: (SHOCKED) Why?

LUCRETIA: Cos it's all he had I dare say. The masters said the whys and wherefores were of no account, he was sinful and beat him black and blue. They said he'd go to hell. And he did.

SABRINA: What d'you mean?

LUCRETIA: He snuffed it - and the matron said he'd gone to Hades and that's where we'd all go if we got up to any dirty tricks. So that's your "Sidney" for you.

SABRINA: Mr Day says "Sidney" is after Mr Algernon Sidney.

LUCRETIA: Never heard of him.

SABRINA: He's one of Mr Day's heroes – a political person.

LUCRETIA: (TUTS) Sabrina's a daft name an' all.

SABRINA: It's after the River Severn.

LUCRETIA: I've never heard of that neither.

SABRINA: It flows through Shrewsbury...

LUCRETIA: Never heard of that neither. And why didn't he call you "Severn"?

SABRINA SHRUGS. LUCRETIA LAUGHS.

SABRINA: Why did he call you "Lucretia"?

LUCRETIA: God knows and he ain't saying.

BEAT.

SABRINA: What will he do to us?

LUCRETIA: Nothing good.

SABRINA: How can you know that? The bed is not just straw. It's clean.., it smells of... something nice.

LUCRETIA: Lavender.

SABRINA: Lavender.

LUCRETIA: They stick it in Ladies' nosegays so they don't have to smell the shit in the streets.

SABRINA: Shush.

LUCRETIA: It's true.

SABRINA: How do you know?

LUCRETIA: Cos I've stealed enough artefacts from Ladies in the town...

SABRINA: You never!

LUCRETIA: You never been hungry?

SABRINA: Yes... Yes, I have. (BEAT) The beds are nice, aren't they.

LUCRETIA LIES BACK ON THE BED & LUXURIATES.

SABRINA: It's nice isn't it.

LUCRETIA DOESN'T ANSWER.

SABRINA: It is nice. (BEAT) Why do you say nothing good will become of us?

LUCRETIA: Since when has anything good become of you?

SABRINA SHRUGS.

LUCRETIA: See – I told you. And don't talk about "us" neither. Even you should know there ain't no such thing as "us". You're on your own.

SABRINA: You are too.

LUCRETIA: I didn't say I wasn't. That's what I'm on about.

SABRINA: If we prayed we wouldn't be on our own.

LUCRETIA: Where's that ever got you!

SABRINA: You mustn't say that – or "shit", what you said before. God will hear.

LUCRETIA: The Lord bloody Almighty has never heard a bloody bleedin' blasted bugging bastard word I've ever said to him.

SABRINA: But if we prayed together.

LUCRETIA TUTS.

SABRINA: I'll pray for you, Lucretia.

SABRINA KNEELS AND PRAYS.

SABRINA: Dear Lord and Heavenly Father...

LUCRETIA: He might not know who you are – you've changed your name.

SABRINA: He'll know. He knows everything.

LUCRETIA: Ask him what our new master's after then – if we don't already know.

SABRINA: He can't just tell me. He'll show me.

LUCRETIA: I bet he will when the new master's had more than sufficient ale – or gin more like, living in a house like this in London. But they're all the same. When he's had enough ale and he comes slobbering over gone midnight, falling over his breeches, reaching out and grabbing you in the dark, saying you're a good girl. That's how the Lord will show you what Mr Thomas Day's got in store for us...That's how with a stinking rough hand clapped over your mush, a stinking whisper in your ear – "Keep quiet". So you try to talk quiet, inside, to your Lord fucking Almighty – but he or no-one else is listening. Whilse something stiff and sweaty is stuck inside you and hurts so bad, but you daren't scream, only inside – and still your fucking God doesn't listen.

SABRINA: (BEGINS TO SOB) Don't, don't...

LUCRETIA: What's up with you now?

SABRINA: Nobody cares about me.

LUCRETIA: Maybe that God of yours will...

SABRINA: No... He hasn't so far...

SEEING HER DESPAIR LUCRETIA HESITATES THEN GOES TO KNEEL BY HER.

LUCRETIA: We'll be alright... we will.

SABRINA: Will you look after me?

LUCRETIA: Me?

SABRINA: Please.

LUCRETIA: (RUEFUL) If you look out of for me.

SABRINA LEANS INTO HER. A MOMENT THEN LUCRETIA PUTS HER ARM ROUND HER SHOULDER.
LX CHANGE.

THE BEDROOM. A WHILE LATER.

STAGE FRONT - SABRINA LOOKS OUT OF A WINDOW, DOWN AT BUSTLING CHANCERY LANE BELOW. LUCRETIA STILL KNEELS BY THE BED, SLIGHTLY MORE COMPOSED.

SABRINA: Come and see, Lucretia.

LUCRETIA: Who you talking to, country girl.

SABRINA: Come and see.

LUCRETIA: What is there to see?

SABRINA: The street.

LUCRETIA: I've seen a street before. I've seen plenty of streets. More streets than I could shake a stick at. More streets than you, country girl...

SABRINA: You can call me Sabrina – or Miss Sidney.

LUCRETIA: ...in fact I doubt you've ever seen a street .

SABRINA: I've seen streets.

LUCRETIA: I bet you never had proper streets where you come from.

SABRINA: We had 'least three streets in Shrewsbury!

LUCRETIA: Oh, you can count.

SABRINA: Three proper streets come to that.

LUCRETIA: Three streets! My oh my, three streets and I'd wager you still managed to lose yourself.

SABRINA: No...

LUCRETIA: Liar.

SABRINA: Only in the dark.

LUCRETIA: Hasn't they even invented lanterns?

SABRINA: I expect London is all aglow with lanterns.

LUCRETIA: Yes it is. Mostly by link-boys, swarming all over the town – lighting the way for gentry to find the harlots. Like little stars in the dark.

SABRINA: I can't wait for nightfall.

LUCRETIA: Nightfall! What's so good about nightfall? Nightfall's dark and cold...

SABRINA: This house has got fine lamps – and soft beds.

LUCRETIA: (STROKES IT) Nice and soft.

SABRINA: So we won't be cold ever again.

LUCRETIA: The new master will see to that.

SABRINA: He's got a kind face.

LUCRETIA: By tomorrow you'll wish you were out in the cold – or even back where you came from – where they all talk funny and there's not a lamp to light the few streets you claim to possess.

SABRINA: Mr Day won't make me go back...

LUCRETIA: You'll be better off.

SABRINA: We're in London! The capital of the whole of England.

LUCRETIA: Even I know that.

BEAT.

SABRINA: Will he really send me back.

LUCRETIA: When he's had his uses.

SABRINA: What are "uses"?

LUCRETIA: Don't they teach you nothin' where you come from - in the north or whatever they call it.

SABRINA: What's the north?

LUCRETIA: Well it ain't the south is it.

SABRINA GOES BACK TO WINDOW GAZING.
LX CHANGE.

THE DRAWING ROOM.
THOMAS, FIDGETY, PACES.
EDGEWORTH FINDS HIMSELF A SHERRY DECANTER, POURS
THREE GLASSES. BICKNELL PREOCCUPIED, GOES OVER LEGAL
DOCUMENTS.

EDGEWORTH: Drink, Bicknell?

BICKNELL: I want to peruse the documents.

THOMAS: It's a bit late for that – they're signed and sealed and the girls duly delivered.

BICKNELL: Signed over to Edgeworth and me...

THOMAS: I'm most appreciative.

EDGEWORTH: So you should be.

BICKNELL: So if your little scheme comes to grief in any way, it is Edgeworths and my reputation that will be at stake.

THOMAS: Reputation - you're only a lawyer!

BICKNELL MIFFED.

EDGEWORTH: Have a drink by way of celebration, Tommy.

THOMAS: No thank you.

EDGEWORTH: Drink it, man, you're jiggling about like a weasel. This will sooth your nerves.

THOMAS: I don't want my nerves soothing. I'm alive. For the first time in my life, truly alive.

BICKNELL: We can see that.

BEAT.

THOMAS: Only months ago I was full of despair.

BICKNELL: Yes...

EDGEWORTH: Ah yes. It was very sad.

THOMAS: It was worse than sad.

EDGEWORTH: My sister didn't set out to break your heart.

THOMAS: Whether or what she intended I know not – but it was as if I'd been chained to her, like a poor slave in a galley. (GENTLY MIMICS MARGARET WHO IS IRISH) "Thomas, yes, I have feelings towards you." (HIMSELF) Not as strong as mine.

EDGEWORTH: It's no good being bitter.

THOMAS: Bitterness is not an emotion I claim, sir! (MIMICS MARGARET) "Dear Thomas, I hold you in the greatest of affection..."

EDGEWORTH: There I told you – bitter.

THOMAS: (CONTS AS MARGARET) "but my father says you are not a gentleman..."

EDGEWORTH: It's true – our father loathed you. Still does. My wife ain't much keener on you.

THOMAS: Not a gentleman! I'm a gentleman of independent means. I might not possess one one of the largest estates in Ireland – like your family, a village bearing the family name. But it's Ireland, Richard – Ireland! I attended Charterhouse and Oxford Corpus Christie.

BICKNELL: For all your education, Thomas, even you must see you haven't acquired the polish of a gentleman.

EDGEWORTH: That's exactly what my sister said.

THOMAS: I confess. And do you know why? The more exposure I had to the sons of the gentfolk – the gentlemen of the future, the more I resisted the laws laid down. The more I fought against it – with my fists if necessary. Whilst I didn't bring a degree away from Oxford, I learned well the ways of the aristocrats and high church - and in so doing devised ways of resisting them.

So, a gentleman I am not. For I have never taken a riding crop to a tardy ostler... neither one to a horse. Nor lived on any grand estate – in Ireland or England come to that, built and sustained on the trading of poor savages - then bloating myself on the sugar they cut – which in my opinion is bitter not sweet – that is real bitterness, Edgeworth, sugar cut as much by the lash as by the machete. Nor wrapped my "gentleman's" bloated body in soft cotton plucked by bent bodies, striped red across their backs. No, I'm not that kind of gentleman – nor serviced illiterate maids when I come in drunk in the small hours, as the girl, just risen, lights wet coals to warm the mansion.

EDGEWORTH: Are you referring to me, Thomas!

THOMAS: (CONTS) Offering only pox, disgrace and orphans many of who will not see the age of five years. Which might be a blessing. No, I am not that kind of gentleman...

EDGEWORTH: No, you aren't... Praise the lord you aren't. But...

THOMAS: But? But what! I am not that kind of gentleman.

BICKNELL: We know.

EDGEWORTH: And yet...

THOMAS: Blast it – another qualification.

EDGEWORTH: You did agree with my sister that you would go away for a year...

THOMAS: Twelve painful months.

EDGEWORTH: To become a gentleman.

THOMAS: She expected me to whip, fornicate and grasp my way into the aristocracy then.

BICKNELL: Of course she didn't. She expected you to learn to dance, to eat with some decorum...

THOMAS: Decorum. Pah!

EDGEWORTH: And carry yourself well...

THOMAS: Carry myself! I can perambulate.

BICKNELL: You hardly walk like a gentleman.

EDGEWORTH: No, you don't, Tommy – you ramble and shamble.

BICKNELL: And talk at the table, spraying all and sundry.

EDGEWORTH: And as for dancing...

BICKNELL & EDGEWORTH CRACK UP.

THOMAS: I was prepared to try! I did try. For a year - more than tried. I can use a knife and fork...

EDGEWORTH: I know.

THOMAS: But I was damned if I was going to wear a powdered wig.

BICKNELL: I don't – well, only for my occupation – the law.

EDGEWORTH: The ladies admire a wig. As a gentleman admires a lady in a wig.

BICKNELL: You admire ladies no matter how they come, Richard.

EDGEWORTH: So long as they “come”.

THOMAS & BICKNELL DON'T GET IT.

EDGEWORTH: I admire ladies, yes. It's mans God-given right – nay, duty. Not dirty ones... or naggers... or ugly ones... (COLLECTS HIMSELF) My sister Margaret was none of these things.

THOMAS: If I had gentrified myself – it would have been to no avail. No avail – your sister had found another. A gentleman. They became betrothed.

EDGEWORTH: I'm sure they will find happiness.

THOMAS: Founded on my unhappiness. My extreme unhappiness. My grief-ness. My bereft-ness. My broken heartedness.

BICKNELL: You aren't the only one.

EDGEWORTH: You, Bicknell!

BICKNELL: Yes, Edgeworth.

EDGEWORTH: There's as much undisturbed dust in your britches as on your legal tomes.

BICKNELL: I'm a man.

EDGEWORTH: Follow Thomas's example then – “rescue” a promising young virgin from an institution.

BICKNELL: I have – for him.

THOMAS: I'm most grateful.

EDGEWORTH: (TO BICKNELL) Get yourself one.

BICKNELL: I prefer to take the tried and tested route.

EDGEWORTH: Methinks the dust in your darker regions will remain undisturbed.

THOMAS LAUGHS. BICKNELL DOESN'T.

EDGEWORTH: (TO BICKNELL) Whether or not. Thomas has acted. He's a doer – like me.

THOMAS: Not quite like you, Richard.

EDGEWORTH: Not at all like me come to think of it –but no matter. Your heart is mended from my sister's vacillations.

THOMAS: (NO) Yes.

EDGEWORTH: And you, young, only 21.

THOMAS: Sometimes I don't feel young.

EDGEWORTH: On the threshold of your manhood. You, with a once-broken heart, choked by chains, has freed his soul, free to FEEL like the greatest Frenchman of all time has declared...

THOMAS: Jean Jaques Rousseau.

EDGEWORTH: Rousseau indeed. You are free, you have shaken off those shackles.

THOMAS: If it was as easy for those wretched slaves to do as much.

EDGEWORTH: Yes, yes, yes – but no need to cross the Atlantic ocean at this point in time. You have truly shaken off your shackles...

THOMAS LOOKS.

EDGEWORTH: ...upstairs you have two mostly unspoilt young maidens – well, spoilt by society, not “soiled”.

BICKNELL: As far as we can ascertain.

EDGEWORTH: Do you want me to “ascertain”, Tommy.

THOMAS: No!

THOMAS LOOKS TO THE CEILING, BECOMES MORE ANIMATED AGAIN LIKE WE FIRST SAW HIM.

THOMAS: I will take a sip of sherry.

EDGEWORTH GIVES HIM ONE. BEAT. THEN HE MAKES IT A LARGE ONE. THOMAS HAS A LARGE SWIG.

THOMAS: You approve of what I'm attempting?

EDGEWORTH: Heartily. In every sense. You, Thomas, are a man of the coming age. A bold man. A brave man – which you will need to be, if you are to be a truly enlightened man.

THOMAS: That's what I intend to be.

EDGEWORTH: You will.

THOMAS: Why didn't your sister Margaret didn't see such virtue...

EDGEWORTH: Don't start on bloody Margaret again... (BEAT) Perhaps you were too enlightened for her. Perhaps she's happier simply sitting at home in front of a mirror making herself look fine for her new beau.

THOMAS: She looked fine.

BICKNELL: She did. Fine in extremis. Mighty fine.

EDGEWORTH: That is all very well in a woman – but not for the likes of you, Tommy.

BICKNELL: Or even me.

EDGEWORTH: We are new men. We will change the world, not by sitting in coffee houses taking tobacco. We will change it by doing. We are new men for a new world. Why me myself am inventing machines that will improve the world.

BICKNELL: (SARC) Like your mechanical horse, Richard...

EDGEWORTH: Why not – no flightiness – and no shit... I just need a means to power it.

THOMAS: And your umbrella for haystacks is a grand idea.

EDGEWORTH: I know. Pity no one wants to manufacture it.

BICKNELL: (SARC) Your wind-powered carriage?

EDGEWORTH: Precisely.

BICKNELL: But you can only travel the way the wind's a-blowing.

EDGEWORTH: Ships manage it.

BICKNELL: Don't you like horses?

EDGEWORTH: Of course I do – I've covered many an acre on a horse.

BICKNELL: It's a fine thing if you have the leisure to pursue it.

EDGEWORTH: Yes, well what's the use of festering in the Courts of London – amid the stink of the river, the fustiness of piles of red ribboned papers, inventing lies for which ever side has the tin to pay you.

BICKNELL: I say!

EDGEWORTH: Hardly a noble occupation... Yet Thomas here is pursuing the most noble aim any man could aspire to – creating the perfect wife.

THEY MUSE.
LX CHANGE.

THE BEDROOM.
LUCRETIA LIES ON THE BED.
SABRINA TURNS IN FROM LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW.

SABRINA: I heard Mr Edgeworth talking in the coach - he was telling Mr Day he's going to experiment on Dick.

LUCRETIA LOOKS THEN BURSTS OUT LAUGHING.

SABRINA: What?

LUCRETIA: You said Mr Edgeworth was going to experiment on his dick.

SABRINA: I didn't!

LUCRETIA: I'm going to tell Mr Day you said "dick".

SABRINA: Don't. I didn't.

LUCRETIA: I heard you.

SABRINA: It's a name.

LUCRETIA: It's not all it is.

SABRINA: I know what else it is.

LUCRETIA: Not all innocent then are you.

SABRINA: Don't be rude.

LUCRETIA: Dick! Dick...

SABRINA GIVES UP AND LOOKS OUT AGAIN.

SABRINA: Come and see.

LUCRETIA: It's not the Irishman waving his you-know-what is it?

SABRINA: It's two fine ladies if you must know. Come and see how they walk.

LUCRETIA: Fine or not they've only got two legs apiece.

SABRINA: Look. Ahh...

LUCRETIA: What sort of institution did you come from - Bedlam?

SABRINA: What?

LUCRETIA: Well, going on like that you'll end up there. "Look at the fine ladies. Ahhh."
"Look at Mr Irish Edgeworth's dick, ooh."

SABRINA TURNS TO IGNORE HER BY LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW.

SABRINA: Ahh...

LUCRETIA DECIDES SHE MIGHT AS WELL JOIN HER.

SABRINA: (PLEASED) See, aren't they fine?

LUCRETIA: They look stuck up, in my opinion.

SABRINA: Do you think I could turn out like that?

LUCRETIA: No.

SABRINA: Why?

LUCRETIA: Because you're going to Bedlam – I've told you. (BEAT) Mind I could be a lady.

SABRINA: Could you?

LUCRETIA: Why not? (OUTSIDE) Look at them – like they own the place.

SABRINA: They might.

LUCRETIA: No, they don't. They'll be owned by rich gentlemen – who let them run about town while they drink brandy and smoke tobacco.

SABRINA: You know everything.

LUCRETIA: I know. And I know I could be a better lady than them. (SHE BEGINS TO MIMIC THE WOMEN OUTSIDE) First, you have to stick your nose in the air. You know why?

SABRINA: It's ladylike.

LUCRETIA: So you can't smell the horse-shit.

SABRINA: Lucretia!

LUCRETIA: And you know why they hold their dresses like so? (PICKS UP THE HEM OF HER GOWN & PRANCES) So they don't trail them in it.

SABRINA LOOKS OUT.

SABRINA: You're right.

LUCRETIA: (LOOKS OUT) I am, aren't I. Look at that one there – is it a bustle or a big fat arse!

SABRINA FEELS SHE SHOULD BE SHOCKED BUT THEY BOTH CORPSE.

LUCRETIA: Go on, be a lady... Nose up, petticoats up, and prance around the dollops...

THEY BOTH DO IT.

LUCRETIA: (POSH) Oh, helloo, h'l'm h'a lady.

SABRINA: (POSH) Oh helloo, h'l'm h'a lady.

LUCRETIA: You didn't sound like a lady. Not a proper one. Not like me.

SABRINA: But I could learn.

LUCRETIA TUTS.
SABRINA HAS ANOTHER GO AT IT.

SABRINA: (POSH) Oh helloo, h'l'm h'a lady.

THOMAS ENTERS.
SURPRISED TO SEE WHAT'S GOING ON. LUCRETIA SEES HIM FIRST, STANDS & CURTSEYS, BUT DOESN'T LET ON TO OBLIVIOUS SABRINA WHO CONTINUES WITH HER LADY IMPRESSIONS.

SABRINA: (POSH) Oh helloo, h'l'm h'a lady. Don't let me... a-step in a dollop. Don't let me, a-step in a dollop...

THOMAS: What are you doing?

SABRINA IS MORTIFIED.

SABRINA: (HEAD BOWED) Nothing, sir, I'm sorry, sir... Please don't...

THOMAS: Very good...

THE GIRLS LOOK.

THOMAS: Excellent...

LUCRETIA: Look, sir, I can be a lady and dance about horse droppings.

SHE DOES WHAT SABRINA WAS DOING.

THOMAS: Desist!

LUCRETIA: What?

THOMAS: Stop. Stop at once.

LUCRETIA: You said she was very good! Excellent!

THOMAS: Her attitude was excellent – her attitude.

BEAT THEN LUCRETIA REALISES WHAT'S REQUIRED. SHE BOWS HER HEAD.

LUCRETIA: Sorry, sir – I got carried away by Miss Sabrina's... cavortings.

THOMAS: Very good... excellent.

LUCRETIA GIVES SABRINA A TRIUMPHANT SMILE.

LUCRETIA: Please may I ask, kind sir, what are your intentions for us... if I might make to be so bold...

THOMAS: Sit down.

THEY BOTH SIT ON THE BED.
THOMAS FRAMES HIS THOUGHTS BEFORE SPEAKING.

THOMAS: Now there is much you will not need to know.

LUCRETIA: She don't know much anyway, sir – she's only a bumpkin.

THOMAS: (CONTINUES) And there is much you will need to forget.
You will become blank sheets of paper...

THE GIRLS LOOKS AT EACH OTHER – BLANK.

THOMAS: ...then upon those pure white pages I will write new lives for you.

LUCRETIA: We ain't had no education, sir.

THOMAS: I know.

LUCRETIA: So even I don't know what you're on about – let alone her.

SABRINA: You plan to give us new lives, Mr Day.

THOMAS: I intend to marry you.

THEY BOTH LOOK.

SABRINA: Marry us...

LUCRETIA: I've nothing to wear.

THOMAS: Not now, you silly girl – not both of you.

SABRINA: When?

LUCRETIA: Which one?

THOMAS: That's yet to be decided.

LUCRETIA: When?

THOMAS: When a year has passed.

LUCRETIA: What will happen to her?

THOMAS: The one who I decide is not suitable wifely material will be found suitable employment.

LUCRETIA: Doing what?

THOMAS: (CONTS) And I will make a generous settlement on her to allow her to build her own life.

SABRINA: What's a settlement?

LUCRETIA: Money? (TO THOMAS) How much?

THOMAS: Do not trouble yourself with that.
(FINALLY) And so for the next 12 months we shall live together. I will be your mentor, tutor and protector...
(HE'S ABOUT TO GO, THEN GOES TO THE WINDOW)
You shall not bother yourself with the painted ladies who happen to pass by. You will have no contact with either that shallow world – or your squalid origins. For you, I, we are embarking on a unique adventure. One which will change all of our lives, change the world as we know it.

SABRINA: And one of us will become Mrs Day...

LUCRETIA: Or cop for a "settlement"...

END OF SCENE 1

ACT ONE SCENE 2

CHANCERY LANE. PARLOUR. TWO WEEKS LATER.

SABRINA HAS A PEEP OUT OF THE WINDOW. LUCRETIA SITS, FIDGETY, BORED.

LUCRETIA: I'll tell him.

SABRINA: What?

LUCRETIA: You know what fine well – you gawping out of the window. He says you ain't to trifle yourself looking at ladies.

SABRINA: I'm not.

LUCRETIA: What you looking at?

SABRINA: People. (QUICK) But not fine ladies.

LUCRETIA: I'll still tell him.

SABRINA: But we've been here so long – I want to see London.

LUCRETIA: What's that out the window – Scotch mist!

SABRINA: Don't you want to see the grand city?

LUCRETIA: I've seen enough of it to know it ain't so grand.

SABRINA: (SEES SOMETHING OUTSIDE WHICH DISGUSTS HER) Ew...

LUCRETIA: (GOING OVER TO SEE) What?

SABRINA: That man is putting dog dirt in a sack.

LUCRETIA: He must be hungry.

SABRINA LOOKS. LUCRETIA LAUGHS.

LUCRETIA: He's only a "pure" collector... If he fills the sack he can sell it to a saddle maker or some such.

SABRINA: Why?

LUCRETIA: Cos it... cos... it makes the leather soft or something.

SABRINA: I wouldn't pick up dog dirt for anyone.

LUCRETIA: Maybe you'd sooner starve.

SABRINA: Mr Day won't let me.

LUCRETIA: (DISMISSIVE) See that blind beggar.

SABRINA: Aw...

LUCRETIA: He's lucky. Lucky cos the good Lord's taken the light out of his eyes.

SABRINA: God wouldn't do that.

LUCRETIA: He works in mysterious ways – and for that old cove it means he'll get more farthings being blind.

SABRINA PONDERERS.

LUCRETIA: Look at that scraggy old bunter - trying to act the lady – Gentlemen and sailors, shutting their eyes to the pox scabs, cos the ladies at home lie stiff as planks, knees nailed together – will give the ugly old bag a shilling or two to have their way.

SABRINA: Why do you always think the worst of people?

LUCRETIA: You must be blind as that beggar if you can't see that – an' don't tell me chaps aren't any different in Shropshire or whatever you call it.

BEAT.

SABRINA: But we're lucky now. Safe in a fine house.

LUCRETIA: I don't know...

MRS GRIDGRAND, THE HOUSEKEEPER, ENTERS - A LOUD COCKNEY WHO BELIEVES SHE'S AT A LOWER STATION THAN GOD INTENDED – SHE SEES HERSELF AS A GOVERNESS AT LEAST.

MRS G: Come on, stop that frolicking.

LUCRETIA: I was telling Sabrina she shouldn't be looking out of the window.

SABRINA: Where's Mr Day?

MRS G: Never mind where Mr Day is. Carousing with his acquaintance Mr Bicknell in the Courts of Law I dare say.

SABRINA: Can I help with the housework, Mrs Gradgrind?

MRS G: At this moment I am not a housekeeper.

LUCRETIA: You are.

MRS G: Not at this very moment, I aren't. At this very moment I am taking your education in hand. I – am your governess.

LUCRETIA: You aren't.

SABRINA: I would like to learn, please.

LUCRETIA: You've got a lot to learn.

MRS G: (TO SABRINA) You've got the making of a good girl.

LUCRETIA: "You've got the making of a good girl."

MRS G: (RAISES HAND) And you've got the makings of a wicked little minx.

SABRINA: (QUICK) Mr Day doesn't approve of chastising children.

MRS G LOOKS.

LUCRETIA: That's right. Mr Day says people who beat children are no better than slave-owners.

SABRINA: He does, Mrs Gridgrand...

MRS G: What does he know about slave-owners?

LUCRETIA: He knows he don't like them.

MRS G: If he's so clever how are they going to make them lazy niggers work?

LUCRETIA: He knows we aren't niggers – so he 'specially won't approve of you chastising me.

SABRINA: Please teach us, madam.

MRS G: "Madam". I likes that. I can see – with my help, you've got the makings of a passable lady of the lower h'orders. With my help I dare say I could make you into something not too grand - a shopkeeper's wife...

LUCRETIA: What kind of shop!

MRS G: ...or if you wants to earn a living like I myself have to do...

LUCRETIA: We don't want to be servants like you.

MRS G: I'm a 'ousekeeper! Really. Thinking I'm a servant! Hopeless. (TO SABRINA) You, my dear, might have the acumen to climb out of your social status.

LUCRETIA: I should hope so – they don't come much lower than us foundling girls.

MRS G: That is the first right and proper thing you've said. There's them as think – good Christian people too, who think it would have been a blessing all round if some of you foundlings had never been found...

SABRINA: What – left to die!

MRS G: ...but some good Christian people...

SABRINA: Like yourself...

MRS G: ...thinks if I can save one sinner... (RE LUCRETIA) ...even if there's a thousand as'll perish.

LUCRETIA: (MUTTERS) Mare.

MRS G: (CONTS) ...there'll be much rejoicing in heaven.

SABRINA: What kind of job could I do – with your wisdom?

MRS G: Wisdom... (COLLECTS HERSELF) Well – as I said on an earlier occasion – using all my “wisdom”, I think I could raise you above your born station.

LUCRETIA: That wouldn't take much - no-one wanted her.

MRS G: Or you. (TO SABRINA) So I wouldn't turn your head by giving you high aspirations – but if you learnt some decorum you might aspire to be a milliner.

SABRINA: (DELIGHTED) A milliner! You really think I could be a milliner? (BEAT) What's a milliner?

MRS G: A hat-maker.

SABRINA: I've never had a hat. I've worn bonnets, of course.

MRS G: If we can't achieve that mind, you'd have to settle for being a teacher.

SABRINA: Oh...

MRS G: You'd get food and lodgings...

SABRINA BRIGHTENS.

LUCRETIA: How can she be a teacher – she can't read or write.

SABRINA: How do you know?

LUCRETIA: Can you?

SABRINA SULKS.

MRS G: I could learn you enough to get by.

LUCRETIA: Can you read and write?

MRS G: Of course I can, you rude girl. (BEAT) Enough to get by.

SABRINA: Can you, Lucretia?

LUCRETIA: (LIES) Enough to get by.

MRS G: Spell... (BEAT) Spell "stupid".

LUCRETIA: I says I can do enough to get by – meanin' why should I bother.

SABRINA: (PLEASED) Oh can't you, Lucretia – that's a marvel.

LUCRETIA AND MRS G LOOK AT HER.

SABRINA: It means you're as ignorant as me.

LUCRETIA: I am not.

SABRINA: (TO MRS G) Please, Mrs Gridgrand – teach us both how to read and write.

MRS G: I don't know about her.

LUCRETIA: I don't need to.

SABRINA: Please. (TO LUCRETIA) You could help me.

LUCRETIA: I could if I wanted... (BEAT) Alright Mrs – you can teach me too.

MRS G: Yes well if I do – if you don't pay proper attention I'll flay the skin off you – Mr Day or no Mr Day.

SABRINA: Oh thank you.

LUCRETIA: Why are you thanking her.

MRS G: And I'll train you in the ways of the world while I'm at it.

SABRINA: I'm sure Mr Day will be pleased as punch.

MRS G: Now a young lady wouldn't say that – pleased as punch.

LUCRETIA: No – he'd be happy as a dog with two dicks.

MRS G CUFFS HER.

LUCRETIA: I'll tell him.

MRS G: And I'll tell him you said "A dog with two.."

LUCRETIA: Two what?

MRS G: You know.

LUCRETIA: "Dicks"?

MRS G CUFFS HER AGAIN.

LUCRETIA: She (SABRINA) taught me that word.

SABRINA: I never.

BUT MRS G HAS CUFFED HER. SHE TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

MRS G: Now then... (MUSES) I must get myself a switch. (CONTS) Mr Day will be "most h'appreciative". Repeat after me – "Mr Day will be most h'appreciative."

LUCRETIA & SABRINA: Mr Day will be most h'appreciative.

LUCRETIA: (MUMBLES) Not if you chastise us.

MRS G: (IN FULL FLOW) "Mr Day will be most h'appreciative. Mr Day will be most h'appreciative." (GRANDER) "Mr Day will be most h'appreciative."

THOMAS & BICKNELL ENTER. THOMAS SURPRISED THEN SHOCKED.

THOMAS: Please tell me what is going on.

LUCRETIA: Mrs Gridgrand is giving us some "h'education".

LAUGHS BUT THOMAS GIVES HIM A GLARE.

MRS G: I thought it would be as well if I occupied the girls' time gainfully, sir.

THOMAS: You did, did you.

MRS G: So they're fit for any purpose a young gentleman would put them to.

BICKNELL: That sounds reasonable, Tom.

THOMAS: It does not sound reasonable to me.

SABRINA: Beg your pardon, sir, but the lady was only trying to make us fit for purpose.

MRS G: Whatever that purpose might be.

THOMAS: What my purpose is is of no matter to you.

BICKNELL: I'm sure the good lady is only trying to assist.

MRS G: Of no matter to me! Of no matter to me! Even the butcher, a scurvy, more blotched face fellow you couldn't meet, even he implicated I was no more than a madam. Me, sir – a madam? A bawd! A procurator of young flesh for a certain young gentleman who will remain nameless.

LUCRETIA: Mr Day...

MRS G CLIPS HER.

THOMAS: How dare you?

MRS G: You're not much beyond the age of a larruping yourself!

BICKNELL: Mrs Gridgrand – Mr Day is...

MRS G: Mr Day is doing one of two things – he's either establishing himself in a missionary position...

THOMAS: I beg your pardon!

MRS G: Saving two wicked waifs and is about to knock some Christianity into 'em out of the goodness of his heart. And who would jib at that. OR...

BICKNELL: Yes?

THOMAS: Her opinion is of no consequence.

MRS G: Or, sir – he is a priapic brigand...

THOMAS: Enough, madam.

MRS G: (CONTS) ...who is intent on satisfying nothing but the longings in his loins!

SABRINA: (TO LUCRETIA) What's priapic?

THOMAS: Enough!

LUCRETIA: Priapic? Is it to do with priapus!

THOMAS: Cease.

MRS G: There now I've said it.

THOMAS: You've said too much, Mrs Gridgrand.

MRS G: I'll have a sight more to say if I'm up before the beak 'splainin' that I've never run a disorderly house in my life and I don't intend startin' now – for a gentleman or not. And you ain't one if that's your intention.

BICKNELL: Mr Day's intentions are entirely honourable I can assure you, Mrs Gridgrand.

MRS G: Now you do seem an honourable gentleman, Mr Bicknell. But it has not escaped my h'attention that you are a man of the law...

THOMAS: What more assurance do you need! It was good enough for the Guardians of the Foundling institution.

MRS G: Yes, but no offence intended, many of them will be men cut from the same cloth. Worthy you might say. Which in my 'umble opinion can mean being one thing for the good lady at home and another for the wicked ladies like them plying their trade up and down the Strand and round about St Pauls. Why, a clergyman attached to the foundling hospital itself was himself executed for misdemeanours.

BICKNELL: Madam – I know not what you imply but I – and my associates – have never transgressed in matters of morality.

MRS G: You are a man of the law...

BICKNELL: I am training for the bar, yes.

MRS G: I rest my case, so to speak. Having sat in the public gallery on more than one occasion I have witnessed you so-called men of the Law. No disrespect but I ain't seen a honest one amongst them. If one says black's white, as sure as eggs, t'other says white's black. So it stands to reason at least half ain't tellin' the truth, whole truth and nothin' but the truth.

LUCRETIA: She's right.

THOMAS: Oh do be quiet.

BICKNELL: Mrs Gridgrand you can be assured Mr Day's intentions are fully honourable – and myself and Mr Edgeworth will continue to vouch for him.

THOMAS: The only being who will vouch for me is my maker.

MRS G LAUGHS.

THOMAS: How dare you, you vulgar bissom.

BICKNELL: Thomas...

THOMAS: No. I will not be lectured to and mocked by... by a woman... a housekeeper...

MRS G: Yes, I am a woman. And a housekeeper. And I ain't ashamed of bein' neither. I'm not. Why should I be?

THOMAS: I've heard enough.

MRS G: I don't know what you've heard but you ain't listenin'. So you'll let your maker judge you will you? How many times have I heard that!

LUCRETIA: It's like the gov'nor at the spike I ended up in – forever sayin' that she was.

THOMAS: Be quiet!

MRS G: They say it in my opinion – not out of believing they truly will be judged – they're saying it because they believe they won't!

LUCRETIA CLAPS DELIGHTED.

MRS G: Hypocrites I say.

LUCRETIA: So do I.

BICKNELL: Madam.

MRS G: (CONTS) Like them snooty fellers up this very road and the Strand, not to mention Covent Garden, visitin' their doxies...

LUCRETIA: (TO SABRINA) I told you.

MRS G: (CONTS) ...and them "ladies" an' "gen'lemen" steppin' over cripples like they was horse manure in the streets. They all say they'll be judged, up there. I reckon you reckon you'll buy some time – buy time to be wicked, evil. Reckon if you come over all pious – be you kings, gentlemen, lying lawyers or even dog shit collectors...

LUCRETIA: (TO SABRINA) Told you.

MRS G: ...you can do the devil's work to your heart's content – then a donation to the church or the poor box – or a prayer for forgiveness will see you marching through the pearly gates.

BICKNELL: You will stop this tirade at once.

MRS G: All I'm sayin' is – if you're a piss pot down here, you ain't got no chance up there.

THOMAS: I am not a piss-p...

MRS G: Ain't you?

THOMAS: No, I ain't – aren't.

BICKNELL: He's not.

LUCRETIA: She's tellin' em.

THOMAS: That is it! I am a good man – intent only on making the world a better place.

MRS G: For yourself and your like.

THOMAS: I will not justify myself to the likes of you. I despise that world outside the window.

MRS G: What about the world behind closed velvet curtains? I've heard enough about those Hell Fire Clubs where gentlemen take their pleasures – Lord Sandwich and Sir Francis Dashwood and the like...

THOMAS: Go!

MRS G: Go where.

THOMAS: Put the children to bed – but do not speak to them.

MRS G: What?

THOMAS: Do not speak to them. (TO GIRLS) Do your appropriate ablutions.

SABRINA: What, sir?

THOMAS: Clean your teeth, say your prayers – oh and use the gemima. On no account listen to or talk to her. Now go...

A MOMENT THEN MRS G NODS TO LUCRETIA & SABRINA MOVE TO GO UPSTAIRS WITH HER.

THOMAS: (TO BICKNELL) Damn woman...

BICKNELL: I think she's only trying to...

JUST BEFORE THEY EXIT SABRINA RUNS BACK TO THOMAS.

SABRINA: Please don't take umbrage with the lady. (BREAKS DOWN & HUGS HIM) Don't take umbrage with me or Lucretia... We were only trying to be good.

THOMAS COULD ALMOST HOLD HER - BUT CAN'T.
LUCRETIA THROWN BY THIS, DECIDES SHE'LL HAVE SOME OF THE ACTION. SHE RUNS TO HUG THOMAS.

LUCRETIA: Oh kind sir – don't send us back.

A MOMENT. THOMAS AT A LOSS WHAT TO DO.

BICKNELL: Go to your bedroom, girls.

THEY LOOK TO THOMAS. HE NODS THEM TO GO. UNSURE THEY MOVE TO EXIT. BEAT.

THOMAS: I do not intend sending you away.

LUCRETIA RUNS TO HIM AGAIN.

LUCRETIA: Oh good sweet kind Mr Day.

THOMAS: Desist, for heaven's sake.

THEY GO TO LEAVE. SABRINA CURTSIES. LUCRETIA DECIDES TO FOLLOW SUIT. THEY GO.

THOMAS: Good girls. Splendid. Good girls – now go on.

MRS G: Oh my hat. Well you ain't the first feller to fall for that.

SHE LAUGHS & LEAVES.

BICKNELL: What a dreadful drab.

THOMAS SITS. DRAINED BY IT ALL, HE PONDERES.

THOMAS: What to do...

BICKNELL: Employ a new housekeeper.

THOMAS: This whole wretched squalid city will be judging me, libelling me, slandering me, gossiping, snickering and sneering. And not just the city. The whole country. And not just the uneducated masses.

BICKNELL: It's never easy to swim against the tide – a tide of ignorance.

THOMAS: No...

BICKNELL: Imagine what it's been like for Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau.

THOMAS: (NODS) Pilloried... persecuted, exiled. (SUDDENLY) That is it. That is what I must do. Thank you, John.

BICKNELL: I fear nothing I've said will ease your path..

THOMAS: Au contraire...

BICKNELL: Sorry.

THOMAS: French.

BICKNELL: I know.

THOMAS: But Lucretia and Sabrina don't – I take them to France. A new life. A new beginning – for them and for me. France – the cradle of new ideas. The birth place of a new world. The location free of tittle-tattle that smothers this town as surely as the miasmic fog off the river.

BICKNELL: I'm sure there's as much priggery and prudery...That's what I was saying – how Rousseau and Voltaire were hounded.

THOMAS: But their ideas blossomed, bloomed – the seeds have even germinated here – and as far as the new world. You know what. The opposition they met was powerful – the church, the monarch, the state but that opposition has strengthened the ideas, the theories. They are incontestable. Here in England new ideas, enlightened thoughts, are simply derided through ignorance or chatter from behind fans. No. I shall go to France. Clean air and not a word to taint my innocents. I shall undo the damage of their unfortunate histories. Just the girls and me. In a new landscape, finding new ways of seeing – and believing.

BICKNELL: But how will they take to it?

THOMAS: You saw how distressed they were at the prospect of being parted from me – even after a matter of days. In France I will be able to devote all my time to them – and them to me.

BICKNELL: At some point you will have to decide between them...

THOMAS: Exactly. A decision that will not rely on expediency or social convention. Where my mind will be clear. Where time and distance will erase the damage, the corruption and cruelty England has perpetrated – on those poor girls – on indeed myself. I shall start with a clean sheet... We go to France.

END OF ACT ONE.

ACT TWO, SCENE 1

AVIGNON. AN OPEN AREA, A VERANDA & GARDEN TO THE FRONT OF A COMFORTABLE HOUSE (WHERE ALL SCENES IN FRANCE APART FROM THE SAME SIMPLE GIRLS BEDROOM WILL BE PLAYED).

THOMAS & BICKNELL ENTER DRAGGING IN BAGS. SABRINA & LUCRETIA FOLLOW. ALL ARE TIRED. LUCRETIA MAKES MUCH OF BEING STIFF FROM THE LONG JOURNEY.

LUCRETIA: Are we there now?

BICKNELL: (LAUGHS)

THOMAS: Yes, Lucretia, we're there now.

LUCRETIA: About blinking time. My bum's numb.

THOMAS: Lucretia.

LUCRETIA: It's got pins and needles.

BICKNELL: So has mine.

THOMAS: Don't encourage her.

SABRINA: Where though, sir?

BICKNELL: France.

LUCRETIA: We know that.

SABRINA: What's France?

LUCRETIA: Don't you know nothing – it's where they have frogs.

SABRINA: There's frogs in Shrewsbury.

LUCRETIA: I shouldn't think you'd eat 'em – even you. And snails.

SABRINA: 'course not.

LUCRETIA: They do here. Don't they, Mr Day?

THOMAS: Yes...

SABRINA: (STARTS CRYING) I can't eat frogs and 'specially not snails.

BICKNELL: I'm sure you won't be eating either. The French produce the finest cuisine.

LUCRETIA: Talk English, Mr B.

THOMAS: Don't be familiar.

LUCRETIA: (TO SABRINA) Pity he can't speak the King's English neither.

THOMAS: You will not be eating fancy French food.

SABRINA: Are frogs an' snails fancy or not?

THOMAS: You will eat good plain food.

LUCRETIA: Not just gruel, maggoty bread and boiled pigs offal once a month.

THOMAS: No.

SABRINA: Thank you, sir.

LUCRETIA GROANS.

THOMAS: What's the matter?

LUCRETIA: My arse is aching something wicked, sir.

BICKNELL LAUGHS.

THOMAS: Don't say that.

BICKNELL: Your "derriere".

LUCRETIA: That an' all, I dare say, but my arse in particular. Bounced around in that coach – day after day. We must have come a hundred miles.

THOMAS: Six hundred.

SABRINA: How far is a hundred?

LUCRETIA: A long way.

SABRINA: A long way from home...

THOMAS: This is home now.

LUCRETIA: You ain't going to leave us here.

THOMAS: Of course not. It's my home too now.

BICKNELL: Not mine, I'm afraid. I must return to London.

SABRINA: Why?

BICKNELL: To earn my living. I'm not as fortunate as your guardian in being a man of independent means.

LUCRETIA: You are rich then, Mr Day?

THOMAS: I care not for material possessions.

LUCRETIA: You must be rich then?

BICKNELL: Mr Day has come into some money since the death of his father.

LUCRETIA: How much?

THOMAS: Less than I was entitled to if my mother hadn't taken up with another cove. (COLLECTS HIMSELF) It matters not.

LUCRETIA: It'd matter to me if my ma and pa had wealth and some other cove dibbed into the pot.

SABRINA: It'd matter to me if I had a ma and pa.

THOMAS: You've got me – so you won't need to concern yourself with snails, frogs, clothes, shelter...

LUCRETIA: What about the wealth. All that luvverly money. If we had that we wouldn't have to be tied to no man – kind or cruel.

THOMAS: I will give you the chance to acquire far more than simply wealth.

LUCRETIA: What – like a lot of wealth?

THOMAS: The opportunity to fulfil yourselves.

BOTH GIRLS ARE BLANK.

BICKNELL: As you know for one of you Mr Day intends...

THOMAS: (CUTS IN) The coachman is waiting, John.

SABRINA: Only one of us?

BICKNELL: Yes, I really must make my way.

LUCRETIA: We know that but which one of us?

BICKNELL: (LEAVING) Just think how numb my arse, "posterior", will be by the time I arrive back in London... Not to mention sea-sickness. Goodbye.

THOMAS: Thank you, old friend.

THEY SHAKE HANDS & BICKNELL GOES.

SABRINA: Only one of us, Mr Day? Must it be only one of us.

THOMAS: Both of you, all three of us are going on a remarkable journey.

LUCRETIA: Where to?

THOMAS: To find a new way of living – of being. (JOLLYING) So what d'you think?

LUCRETIA: That bridge we come over, Avignon or whatever you call it. Looks like it was about to fall in the river.

THOMAS LAUGHS.

SABRINA: You're laughing, Mr. Day.

HE STOPS.

LUCRETIA: You were. You were chortlin'.

THOMAS: Chortling!

SABRINA: We haven't seen you laugh before.

LUCRETIA: We ain't, Mr Day.

SABRINA: It's nice when you laugh.

THOMAS: Don't be...

SABRINA: I'm sorry.

THOMAS: You think me severe... I'm not severe... I'm serious. Philosophy is serious.

LUCRETIA: What is?

THOMAS: Never mind.

SABRINA: Laugh again for us.

THOMAS: What?

SABRINA: If you'd be so kind.

THOMAS: What's the point of laughing – especially to order.

LUCRETIA: Laugh.

THOMAS: No.

LUCRETIA: I know how I can make you laugh.

THOMAS: I've been in plenty of situations where laughter – too loud laughter – has masked...

SABRINA: What?

THOMAS: Hardly joy.

LUCRETIA: Yes well I've been in enough "situations" where a laugh warranted a beating. You won't beat us if we laugh?

THOMAS: No.

BEAT.

LUCRETIA: Let's make him laugh.

SABRINA: Be respectful, Lucretia.

LUCRETIA THINKS THEN APPROACHES HIM.

LUCRETIA: No, let's make him laugh.

THOMAS: Take the baggage inside.

LUCRETIA DARTS AT HIM & TICKLES HIS RIBS. HE'S SHOCKED
THEN LIGHTENS UP.

LUCRETIA: (TO SABRINA) Come on...

A PAUSE THEN SABRINA JOINS IN TICKLING HIM. HE TRIES TO RESIST
BUT IS SOON ON THE FLOOR BEING TICKLED.
THE FRENCH MAID APPEARS FROM THE HOUSE. SHE'S SHOCKED.
AS IS THOMAS WHEN HE SEES HER. HE PUSHES THE GIRLS
ROUGHLY OFF.

MAID: Monsieur Day...

THOMAS: Yes. You are to be my maid?

MAID: Oui.

THOMAS: Take the bags in then.

MAID: Pardon?

THOMAS TRIES TO RETAIN HIS DIGNITY. BUT LUCRETIA AND
SABRINA GIGGLE.
THEN

END OF ACT 2, SC 1.

ACT TWO, SC 2

AVIGNON.
TWO MONTHS LATER.
THE GARDEN. A MOON-LIT NIGHT.

SABRINA & LUCRETIA SIT ON THE GRASS.

LUCRETIA: He ain't done nothing bad.

SABRINA: He's a gentleman.

LUCRETIA: Two full moons we've seen – he's still not done nothing bad.

SABRINA: No... I've not had to eat a single snail.

LUCRETIA LAUGHS.

LUCRETIA: It's not what you'd call grand though – the grub.

SABRINA: It's better than I ever had.

LUCRETIA: Me too... (BEAT) What's his game...

SABRINA: I don't understand.

LUCRETIA: Maybe he ain't got a game. I met enough so-called gentlemem... parsons, over-seers, squires – they all had a game. Even when they beat me you could see their britches a-rising.

SABRINA: What do you mean?

FITTING BUT THOMAS COMES OUT OF THE HOUSE. HE'S WEARING AN ILL-GEORGIAN OR IS IT LOUIS-EAN WIG. THE GIRLS LOOK – THEN CORPSE.

THOMAS: What's the matter with you?

LUCRETIA: Lawks, if I ain't going to wet my French drawers.

THOMAS: Stop.

SABRINA: Sorry, Mr Day, your head looks funny.

THE GIRLS GO OFF AGAIN.

THOMAS: Really.

HE TURNS TO GO IN.

LUCRETIA: Don't be disgruntled, Mr Day – we've got used to our calico pantaloons. (BEAT) We'll get used to your... your helmet.

THOMAS: It's not a fucking helmet.

SABRINA & LUCRETIA: (SHOCKED) Mr Day – you cussed.

THOMAS: I'm sorry.

LUCRETIA: Cussed good and proper. Effed and jeffed like a lighter man. Cursed like a coal carrier. Swears like a night-soil collector in the Isle of Dogs.

SABRINA: Why are you wearing that on your head?

THOMAS: It's no business of yours.

LUCRETIA: It is if we have to look at it.

THOMAS: It's French.

SABRINA: I know the gentry wear wigs in London...

LUCRETIA: Better uns than that.

SABRINA: (CONTS) . . .but you never did.

THOMAS: If you must know these months on foreign shores have liberated me.

LUCRETIA: Can we have wigs, Mr Day?

THOMAS: No.

SABRINA: The ladies up at that big house do. We've seen them pass in their carriages.

THOMAS: It's a chateau – and they're still silly empty headed, mademoiselles. Take no notice.

LUCRETIA: Why?

THOMAS: Because we came here so you wouldn't have to have your head turned by such frippery.

LUCRETIA: Ain't that on your bonce a bit of a frippery?

THOMAS: I will not tell you again.

SABRINA: I like it here.

THOMAS: Good, Sabrina.

SABRINA: It brings to mind Shrewsbury.

LUCRETIA CORPSES AGAIN.

SABRINA: It does. The river. The bridge. Only it's not as green. It's more golden. It's nice. Isn't it nice, Lucretia?

LUCRETIA: There's less turds floatin' down the river than in London, I'll grant you – an' dead dogs and people come to that.

BUT THOMAS GOES TO SABRINA.

THOMAS: You're doing very well.

LUCRETIA: She ain't done nothing.

SABRINA: She "hasn't" done nothing.

LUCRETIA: She hasn't done "anything" if you must know.

THOMAS: Well done, Lucretia – you spotted the double negative.

LUCRETIA: Yeah well, I know we ain't not done nuffin' bad.

THOMAS LAUGHS.

LUCRETIA: We ain't... 'aven't... Have not.

SABRINA: We haven't, Mr Day.

THOMAS: I know. It's all very promising.

LUCRETIA: Well, if we ain't not done something bad – what have we done good?

THOMAS: "Done well". You've become good friends.

SABRINA: We have, sir.

LUCRETIA GIVES HER A LOOK.

SABRINA: I never had a friend before.

LUCRETIA: I've had ten hundred million.

SABRINA: But now I've got you.

LUCRETIA: Ain't you lucky then.

SABRINA: Yes, I am. I'm blessed.

THOMAS: I think I might be too... Lucretia?

LUCRETIA: It's alright. You ain't tried it on, to give you credit.

SABRINA: Tried what on?

LUCRETIA: Well, I ain't talking about that wig he's got on his napper – cos if he had he wouldn't have got whatever most men are after.

SABRINA: What are they after?

THOMAS: I'm trying to be serious.

LUCRETIA: So am I.

SABRINA LAUGHS.

LUCRETIA: Who tickled your fancy!

THOMAS: (TO LUCRETIA) Flippancy is not a desirable quality.

LUCRETIA: How can I indulge in "flippancy" when I don't know what you're on about.

THOMAS: You know full well. You know far more than you own to. I think you are... potentially... intelligent.

LUCRETIA: I think you thinks too much, Mr Day.

THOMAS: For a woman... girl... young lady – you might have a dangerous amount of potential.

LUCRETIA: Well, I'll tell you this. If you thinks I'm bright, it makes you as bright as a snuffed out candle. I can't read nor write – and neither can she but she's from the North so you wouldn't expect no more...

SABRINA: She's right, Mr Day...

LUCRETIA: (CONTS) ...but the one thing I expected from this 'ere relationship was a spot of h'education. Even that owd cow in London tried her hand wiv us at that. But since we got here – I thought if the old cove...

THOMAS: Who? Me! I'm not old!

LUCRETIA: (CONTS) ...if the old cove ain't going to try the other, least he could do was give us some h'education...

THOMAS: I've been "h'educated".

SABRINA: You said "h'educated", Mr Day.

THOMAS: Irony.

SABRINA: Is that a disease, Mr Day?

THOMAS: Probably.

LUCRETIA: Look, Mr Day, we know you're cleverer than us.

THOMAS: I wouldn't say that...

LUCRETIA: Come off it you 'placent cunt.

SABRINA: Lucretia!

THOMAS: Where did you learn that word?

LUCRETIA: I've heard it 'nough times. Been called it more than a few. What you going to do – flog me – I made sure I always kept a smile on my face – if I was bleedin' inside and out – I'd put a big grin on. That'd soon reduce the lump in their trousers. So beat me all you like. I couldn't be hurt no more than I have. Beat me, you cunt.

THOMAS: I'm not going to beat you... (BEAT) "'placent" by which you mean "complacent".

LUCRETIA: What if I did?

THOMAS: Where did you learn the word?

LUCRETIA: You said it... not "cunt" though. I've heard you say "'placent" enough times... complacent.

THOMAS: Splendid.

THE GIRLS LOOK.

THOMAS: You gained knowledge without formal instruction.

SABRINA: Is that good, Mr Day?

THOMAS: It means I'm heading in the right direction.

LUCRETIA: What direction might that be?

THOMAS: You don't need to trouble yourselves with that.

LUCRETIA: Well, if you must know we are troubled.

SABRINA: I'm not.

LUCRETIA: Yes you are but you're too 'pliant.

THOMAS: "Compliant"! Marvellous. (BEAT) Why are you troubled, Sabrina?

SABRINA: You said you was going to decide.

LUCRETIA: You says not to worry our heads. Well, our heads is worried – especially hers.

THOMAS: I'm your friend. A friend of all the unfortunates. There's no greater champion of the slaves in the Americas. Do you know they're chained and flogged, dragged from their homeland, treated as chattels. Like animals. Monsieur Rousseau defends the rights of all beasts. He will not eat their flesh...

LUCRETIA: Neither do we.

THOMAS: You have good plain food.

SABRINA: You eat meat, Mr Day. You say you can't beat French cuisine.

THOMAS: Um... uh... You eat better food than you would if I hadn't rescued you.

LUCRETIA: That's true – there's hardly a maggot in it.

THOMAS: Well then.

LUCRETIA: Well then this – what's your game?

THOMAS: 'tis no game girls... You will change the way mankind conducts itself – well, more to the point, "womankind".

SABRINA: But we're just poor orphan children.

LUCRETIA: Don't be so green. "We're just poor orphan childers".

THOMAS: You won't always be orphans.

SABRINA: Have you found my mother... even my father.

LUCRETIA: Course he ain't.

BEAT.

SABRINA: Are you going to be our mother and father... well, father...

LUCRETIA LOOKS TO HIM. SHE WANTS TO HEAR "YES".

THOMAS: No...

SABRINA: We have no-one – we're just poor orphans.

LUCRETIA: If you say that again I'll crack your head open.

THOMAS: Your childhood has almost past.

LUCRETIA: I ain't had one.

THOMAS: (CONTS) ...but there's still time. I saved you...

SABRINA: Oh Mr Day.

LUCRETIA: Saved us from what?

THOMAS: You know better than me.

LUCRETIA: (NODS, BEAT) But we don't know what we've got in store for us.

THOMAS: I do... I've told you.

SABRINA: You really mean you might marry one of us poor wretches.

LUCRETIA: Never mind that. I'm no wretch. Which one, Mr Day? Tell us who.

THOMAS: I don't know. It's up to you.

SABRINA: We'll try our best – won't we, Lucretia?

BEAT.

LUCRETIA: I ain't got much choice in the matter have I?

END OF ACT 2, SCENE 2.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

AVIGNON, THE VERANDA, 6 MONTHS LATER.
THOMAS INSPECTS SABRINA & LUCRETIA AS THEY WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO ARRIVE.
BOTH GIRLS ARE FIDGETY – SABRINA CHEWS A NAIL, LUCRETIA CAN'T STAND STILL.
THEY ARE DRESSED SIMPLY, WEARING SIMILAR CLOTHES.

THOMAS: Do stand still, Lucretia...

LUCRETIA: Least I'm not chewing my nails.

THOMAS: Don't chew your nails, Sabrina.

SABRINA: I'm sorry... What do you think they'll make of us?

THOMAS: You aren't prize cattle at a country market. (TO LUCRETIA) Brush Sabrina's hair.

LUCRETIA: Again?

THOMAS: If it stops you fizz jiggling, yes.

LUCRETIA FINDS A BRUSH & DOES AS SHE'S ASKED. SHE'LL GIVE THE ODD OVER ZEALOUS BRUSH TO KEEP HERSELF AMUSED BY SABRINA'S DISCOMFORT.

SABRINA: You think they'll approve though, Mr Day?

THOMAS: The only person whose approval counts is mine.

LUCRETIA: Yes, but you don't say.

SABRINA: Mr Day tells us we're doing very well.

LUCRETIA: He doesn't tell us who's doin' wellest though.

THOMAS: I regret informing you all those months ago about my intentions.

SABRINA: Why?

THOMAS: Because every day since you (LUCRETIA) have demanded if you are my preferred choice.

LUCRETIA: Am I?

THOMAS: (CONTS) ...and you (SABRINA) fret and fawn so that I have no idea of your potential.

SABRINA: I'm truly sorry...

LUCRETIA: You're at it again!

SABRINA: Sorry.

THOMAS: If you had listened you would both know that I will make that decision when you reach womanhood.

SABRINA: When will that be?

THOMAS: It certainly isn't now.

THE MAID ENTERS.

MAID: Monsieur Day, vos visiteurs sont arrivés.

DAY INDICATES THE GIRLS TO STAND UP STRAIGHT. LUCRETIA TRIES TO PULL HER DRESS OUT A BIT AT THE TOP TO ACCENTUATE ANY BREASTS THAT MIGHT LIE BENEATH IT. EDGEWORTH & BICKNELL ENTER, BRINGING SOME OF THEIR TRUNKS AND A BAG OR TWO.

THOMAS: Richard... John...

EDGEWORTH: So Thomas... well, well, well. What have you got for us?

SABRINA CURTSIES, BUT LUCRETIA RUNS TO EDGEWORTH.

LUCRETIA: Oh sir....

EDGEWORTH: (TO THOMAS) Good grief, Day – have you been beating the poor girl so she runs to the first kind face?

THOMAS PROTESTS.

LUCRETIA: Yours is a kind face, sir. How can I ever thank you – for signing me over to your good kind friend Mr Thomas Day esquire.

EDGEWORTH: Ah, I see...

LUCRETIA TURNS HER ATTENTION TO BICKNELL.

LUCRETIA: And you, sir, for rescuing what I regard to be my blessed sister who we call Sabrina – so we all might forget our wicked wretched lives before you good gentlemen saved us like good Christians.

MAID: (MUTTERS)

BICKNELL: (TO SABRINA) And you, Sabrina?

SABRINA: I am truly grateful for what I have received.

MAID LAUGHS.

THOMAS: Allez, Audrey... Apportez des baggages de monsieur.

MAID HAULS A BAG INTO THE HOUSE.

LUCRETIA: (AFTER HER) And be sharp about it. Allez.

THOMAS: You two can help her.

SABRINA: Yes, sir.

LUCRETIA: Aw.

THOMAS: Like a good dutiful wife would.

EDGEWORTH: (TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO THE MAID) Merci, Audrey... (HE PATS HER BACKSIDE) Ah, French women... (TAKES A DEEP BREATH AS SHE PASSES HIM TO LEAVE)
Advice, Thomas. Whilst you're ensconced here – waiting for your nubescences to cross that line into the glory of young womanhood – which for a young man will undoubtedly lead him to worship at the shrine of Onan...

LUCRETIA: Who?

THOMAS: Take the baggage up.

BICKNELL: Richard!

LUCRETIA & SABRINA START TO TAKE A TRUNK BUT DECIDE THE FOLLOWING IS TOO INTERESTING TO MISS. THEY HANG ABOUT.

EDGEWORTH: We're all men. Grief I visit Onan's shrine often enough – due in no small part to the present Mrs Edgeworth, notwithstanding the 4 or 5 children she's expressed, perhaps in no small part due to that fact. So Thomas, while you're exiled in this fair land – advantage yourself of its virtues – the juice of grape, the food and the peasant women. Not the aristocratic women mind you – periwigs, powder and pox is all they'll offer. The peasant women is par excellence. Crunch a clove of garlic, wash down with brandy and the juice of the grape – then take the French girl – all you will smell is lavender and the juice of...

BICKNELL: Edgeworth!

EDGEWORTH: Yes?

BICKNELL: The children...

EDGEWORTH: Yes, sorry... I was forgetting myself. The heady mix of being away from all of home's trials and trivialities... and the prospect of unlimited... with totally compliant...

THE THREE MEN MUSE THEN THOMAS SEES THE GIRLS STILL HANGING ABOUT.

THOMAS: Girls – luggage.

EDGEWORTH: Your little scheme is working then.

LUCRETIA & SABRINA BOTH WANTING TO HEAR MORE QUIETLY SIT ON THE TRUNK.

THOMAS: No. (BEAT) It's not a little scheme – it's a grand scheme. And yes – my grand scheme is working. Two waifs who, if they had been left to their own devices...

BICKNELL: ...or at best left to the care of the mostly well intentioned in some institution – learning at best to be God-fearing.

EDGEWORTH: It's a bad thing – being God-fearing. I've spent too many nights – stiff as a post – lying next to a God-fearing woman. Trouble is she God-fears on my behalf too. There I lie – painfully proud. Who gives me the erection if it ain't God?

BICKNELL: What do you give her though?

EDGEWORTH: She's my damn property... It's written down in damn law.

BICKNELL: I know. Her property is yours too though.

EDGEWORTH: Fine and dandy if she had any!

THOMAS: You own acre after acre in Ireland.

EDGEWORTH: Do it do me any good, sir! I feel favoured if I get a smile or a sigh when I turn to her in my grand bed. My prominence lying against her, what once was, nice and firm arse! (TO THOMAS) Are you acquainted with those midnight foragings, Tommy?

THOMAS: Indeed I'm not.

BICKNELL: You're lucky.

EDGEWORTH: Thank goodness I've got my inventions to occupy my mind. In fact I doubt a damn thing would ever have been invented in the history of man if women were even partially compliant. No Spinning Jenny, no microscope, no telescope. I dare say old Galileo would happily have believed the earth was the centre of the cosmos if his member was more happily occupied than his brain.

THOMAS: And your brain has most recently produced?

EDGEWORTH: Maybe I should invent a woman with two fundamentals.

BICKNELL: Tommy's already got two.

EDGEWORTH: Not that he'd know how to use them.

THOMAS: (CHANGES SUBJECT) So how is Little Dick doing?

LUCRETIA NUDGES SABRINA.

EDGEWORTH: I have sired 4 or 5 children, sir.

BICKNELL: Legally accounted for.

EDGEWORTH: And it is hardly diminutive. Even Mrs E has expressed admiration – increasingly from afar.

THOMAS: I was referring to your son - Richard.

EDGEWORTH: (FONDLY) Ah yes, my Little Dick.

LUCRETIA & SABRINA NEARLY CORPSE.

THOMAS: And Mr Rousseau’s philosophies are beneficial in respect of him?

EDGEWORTH: My most successful invention – or rather Monsieur Rousseau’s. The lad...

BICKNELL: How old is he?

EDGEWORTH: 6 or 7 – or 8. But he is unique. Of course, his mother, sisters, governess and servants ain’t convinced. They love the little darling – but ain’t so keen on his “wild” ways. I tell them he’s not wild – he’s... going to be a product of the enlightenment. He’s not picked up a book – well, only to tear it or hurl it.

THOMAS: He will when he’s ready.

EDGEWORTH: Of course he will. That’s what I tell ‘em.

THOMAS: You’re talking to women though.

EDGEWORTH: Precisely.

BICKNELL: It might be difficult for his mother, as you aren’t there much of the time.

EDGEWORTH: I know. It grieves me not to be. But you try telling her that! And the rest. “Oh Mr Edgeworth – he hurled a book and nearly took my eye out.” Damn fools.

THOMAS: What about your daughters?

EDGEWORTH: All things bright and beautiful. Sugar, spice and all things nice – I wouldn’t put them in care of an unsatiated bachelor like you and Tommy mind you.

HE AND BICKNELL LAUGH.

THOMAS: (IRRITATED) Are you employing Mr Rousseau’s methods with the girls?

EDGEWORTH: I think they’re too far along the road – my little Maria has notions of writing books.

BICKNELL: Why, for heaven’s sake?

EDGEWORTH: It’s a passing fad.

THOMAS: But will they know their place?

EDGEWORTH: Well, I ain't going to take a big stick to them.

BICKNELL: Of course not.

EDGEWORTH: And it's not my problem if they don't – so long as they know who's master of the house. And just as my son, through his training in the ways of Rousseau, will come to discover through the laws of nature his role in life – and fulfil his god-given potential – and so your girls will find theirs.

BICKNELL SEES LUCRETIA AND SABRINA & COUGHS TO INDICATE THEIR PRESENCE.

EDGEWORTH: (OBLIVIOUS) Grief, Bicknell, I hope that ain't consumption.

BICKNELL: The girls...

THOMAS: Lucretia, Sabrina – how many times – take the trunk upstairs.

LUCRETIA: It's a dead weight.

THOMAS: So greater will be the satisfaction for you both when you locate it in the bedchamber.

SABRINA: Sorry, sir.

THEY'RE ABOUT TO LEAVE.

EDGEWORTH: (CONTS TO THOMAS) That is precisely my point. The point has been made. That they can remain here, dutiful and silent means you have already made great strides, Thomas. Without need of the big stick.

LUCRETIA & SABRINA DECIDE THIS IS WORTH LISTENING TO – THEY SIT ON THE TRUNK, HOPING AGAIN TO REMAIN UNNOTICED.

THOMAS: (PLEASED) Oh you think so.

EDGEWORTH: I don't think – I know. If Little Dick was here he'd be glugging wine, taking only the lean meat and throwing anything green at the walls.

THOMAS: It must be difficult.

EDGEWORTH: According to his mother perhaps. But what of any worth comes easy? Galileo threatened with the rack. Voltaire exiled. Rousseau harassed.

BICKNELL: Whilst your experiments in human nature, Thomas, have not been universally derided...

EDGEWORTH: Why should they be!

BICKNELL: Though admittedly those who frequent the coffee houses generally do deride...

EDGEWORTH: Envy. They'd like to acquire a brace of virgins for their own use.

SABRINA: (QUIET TO LUCRETIA) What's a virgin?

LUCRETIA: (QUIET) I knew once.

THOMAS: I have no truck with London gossip.

EDGEWORTH: London! Pah!! It's nothing more than an open sewer.

BICKNELL: I say.

EDGEWORTH: Say what you like Johnny, it's true.

BICKNELL: Don't call me Johnny.

EDGEWORTH: Sorry, Johnny, John, Bicknell – But I'll call London an open stinking sewer though – tell me a street where you can't find a child from 16 down to 10, no eight, who won't offer to pleasure you for a penny.

LUCRETIA: (QUIET TO SABRINA) You can get more than a penny.

BICKNELL: That's human nature. The same the world over.

THOMAS: No.

EDGEWORTH: No, sir – not in Lichfield.

BICKNELL: Lichfield!

EDGEWORTH: Lichfield's a pretty enough place matched with its less handsome bigger brother, Birmingham.

BICKNELL: (LAUGHS) Lichfield.

EDGEWORTH: Laugh John Bicknell, laugh all you like. It's more than likely the laugh of a man driven mad by spending his life cramped in the be-wigged lanes of the Temple, sandwiched twixt vice riven alleys, mouldering stacks of ribbon bundled briefs which fatten the moths and you of the legal persuasion in equal measure, and the fetid turd festooned Fleet and then Thames to its southern quarter...

THE GIRLS TRY NOT TO LAUGH.

BICKNELL: I'd sooner take my chances by the Thames than Lichfield.

EDGEWORTH: It's no doubt where a good number of your clients end up – in the Thames.

There's people who earn their bread dragging out the corpses and selling the lot, down to a glass eye. I dare say the flash finds its way into pies.

THOMAS: But Lichfield, Richard?

EDGEWORTH: It's the cradle of the Enlightenment.

BICKNELL: Lichfield.

EDGEWORTH: There and thereabouts.

BICKNELL: Only because Voltaire decamped to Staffordshire for a time – and even then he believed the servants were poisoning him.

EDGEWORTH: Forget French philosophers.

THOMAS: Even Rousseau?

EDGEWORTH: Of course not Rousseau.

THOMAS: Sorry.

EDGEWORTH: But the next stage – the grand ideas pursued – but now allied with practicality.

THOMAS: That's what I am pursuing with my girls.

EDGEWORTH: That is why I say you would be at home there.

BICKNELL: You compare Lichfield – a country town in the north midlands with the great metropolis – whose power dominates Africa, India, the New World...

BICKNELL: The King don't choose to reside in Lichfield.

THOMAS: He's got a point, Edgeworth.

EDGEWORTH: Old George is mad as cheese half the time by all accounts, which ain't surprising as I doubt an eighth of his blood is English. "Hanover!" Pah. Then add the Dutch and Norman murdering blood. The man would be in Bedlam if our taxes didn't provide for him.

BICKNELL: But Lichfield!

EDGEWORTH: Yes, sir, Lichfield, sir.

BICKNELL: But London, yes, sir, London, sir. The citadel of the rule of the law, Runnymede along the Thames, Magna Carta.

THOMAS: What has Magna Carta got to do with justice for the teeming hoards?

EDGEWORTH: Quite right – the law ain't about justice – it's for fattening solicitors.

BICKNELL: You trained in the law.

EDGEWORTH: I don't practise it though.

THOMAS LAUGHS.

BICKNELL: Culture then - London's theatre. The great actor, David Garrick. Learning – Samuel Johnson producing his dictionary, to capture and keep safe our language. Using where possible the greatest English writers to show us, to remind us, of our heritage...

EDGEWORTH: And where did Johnson and Garrick hail from – Lichfield in Staffordshire.

THE GIRLS LAUGH & CLAP WITH DELIGHT.

BICKNELL: (TO THOMAS) Didn't you tell them to go upstairs?

THE GIRLS STAND TO GO BUT SEEING THOMAS IS ENGROSSED WITH THE DISCUSSION, DON'T.

THOMAS: So Richard – who are these great men of Lichfield and its environs?

BICKNELL: The ones who haven't deserted to the Mecca that is London?

EDGEWORTH: Who – I'll tell you who. Matthew Boulton. He will build monuments on a scale that dwarf the metropolis – from Birmingham to Manchester and Leeds and Liverpool and Bradford.

BICKNELL: He's simply a manufacturer.

EDGEWORTH: He's a visionary. Yes, his factories have in the past produced trinkets.

THOMAS: I see no use for trinkets.

EDGEWORTH: He's not simply a maker of trinkets – not any more. He's an manufacturer.

BICKNELL: A manufacturer! Hardly something one would want in the capital. A dirty occupation.

EDGEWORTH: A sight less dirty than the law. Boulton and his like will transform England. They will build structures grander than those of the greatest mansions and architects. Chimneys taller than spires and towers. And, more importantly, of more use than those who simply want to reside in a palace or castle. His true genius is in co-opting a true engineer – not a chap with a ready smile it is true, James Watt, a Scot, who has glorified the power of steam.

BICKNELL: I'd heard a Cornishman – Trevithick or some such, had made an arrangement for the power of steam to pump water from the tin and copper mines.

EDGEWORTH: But here's Matthew Boulton's genius – he's struck sufficient patents of Watt's ideas to make it doubtful Trevithic will scarce afford a pastie.

THOMAS: That seems unfair.

EDGEWORTH: That's commerce.

THOMAS: I don't see what this has to do with any benefit for me in moving to the North Midlands of England. I'm no engineer.

BICKNELL: No, Thomas – you have the benefit of living well on your father's wealth.

EDGEWORTH LAUGHS.

THOMAS: (TO EDGEWORTH) Are you any different?

BICKNELL: No, he isn't. I'm the only one who labours for a living.

EDGEWORTH: But I – and you Thomas, have grand ideas – my inventions, not to mention my experiment with Little Dick. And you have your girls.

BICKNELL: (TO THOMAS) You ain't doing much else with his life.

THOMAS: I'm campaigning against the wicked business of slavery in the New World. .

EDGEWORTH: We all are. And that is my point. We don't have to be one thing. My God, I could be just an estate owner, kicking peasants, having my metaphorical and literal balls squeezed by my wife. But what is happening in Lichfield and thereabouts – it's a new Renaissance. Lunaticks!

BICKNELL: They're all mad then.

EDGEWORTH: You my dear friend, are mad for not seeing it. But the true lunaticks...

THOMAS: This brandy is not the watered down variety you buy in London...

EDGEWORTH: Proves my point! In that small triangle of the getting on to the northerly parts of England – Birmingham – to Stoke on Trent to...

THOMAS: Don't tell us – Lichfield.

EDGEWORTH: Yes, fucking Lichfield.

SABRINA SHOCKED. LUCRETIA LOVES IT.

EDGEWORTH: And beyond I dare say. (BEAT) A small group have given themselves the epithet – the Lunar Society. The meet at the full moon.

THOMAS: They're warlocks?

EDGEWORTH: Of course they aren't warlocks. The full moon lights their way home – given clement weather – after meetings. Some traversing 20 or 30 miles.

BICKNELL: And why would any sane man traverse that distance at night?

EDGEWORTH: The light of the moon only concerns them in that they do not leave the track and find themselves in a ditch. They travel to find enlightenment, to be enlightened, to find an inner light, to fuel it with new ideas.

THOMAS: That's worth travelling any distance for... (TO EDGEWORTH) Who are these lunatics?

EDGEWORTH: Well, apart from the aforesaid manufacturer and engineer, there is Wedgwood the potter...

BICKNELL: Another tradesman.

EDGEWORTH: He's not simply a tradesman. His interests spread far beyond the lump of clay on the wheel – AND he's a convinced abolitionist...

THOMAS: All intelligent men are.

EDGEWORTH: He intends creating a civilised environment for his employees – he's going to call it Etruria. After the ancient Italian province now known as Tuscany. Really quite beautiful...

BICKNELL: In Stoke!

EDGEWORTH: It demonstrates his horizons are wide – wider than a personage who can see no further than legal verbiage – where's the beauty in that? Where's the truth? Where's the light?

THOMAS: Tell me more.

EDGEWORTH: Then there's Dr Darwin – Erasmus. Not content on spending much of his days dispensing medicines and ministering to the sick over half the county – he's cataloguing plants... he's looking at the strata of rocks near Buxton. In short ordering the world in order to understand it. Then there's Joseph Priestley, a dissenting vicar – who still does his pastoral duties, but is electricity – and what makes air.

BICKNELL: What makes air!

EDGEWORTH: Well, it ain't nothing – deprive a bird of it and it dies. The Derby painter Joseph Wright has depicted it – go to the Midlands – he might immortalise you – in a vaccum with a bit of luck.

BEAT.

THOMAS: What of the women of Lichfield?

BICKNELL: You've already got yourself a pair of them.

EDGEWORTH: Nearly enough for any man.

THOMAS: Of course it is good that men should explore the advantages of this modern age...

EDGEWORTH: But?

BICKNELL: He's afeared the women of Lichfield will be as dynamic as the men - unwomanly.

EDGEWORTH: Of course they aren't unwomanly. The females in Lichfield are among the most beautiful you'll find – with brains to boot.

THOMAS: Brains...

EDGEWORTH: You surely don't want female idiots?

LUCRETIA: Course he don't.

THOMAS: Take the trunk up.

LUCRETIA: It's interestin'.

THOMAS: Take it.

LUCRETIA COULD PROTEST.

BICKNELL: Go on, girls.

SABRINA: (TAKES LUCRETIA'S HAND) Come on, I don't feel... (TO THE MEN) Good evening, gentlemen.

LUCRETIA RELUCTANTLY FOLLOWS SABRINA UPSTAIRS.

THOMAS: What about the trunk?

BICKNELL: I'll do it later.

EDGEWORTH: She's a fine girl... Sabrina.

BICKNELL: (NARKED) She's only a girl, Edgeworth.

THOMAS: Tell me about the women of Lichfield.

BICKNELL: Why?

THOMAS: For matters of comparison.

EDGEWORTH: Well, most of them are the daughters of the Lunaticks or their associates....

THOMAS: And?

EDGEWORTH: You're concerned aren't you, Tommy. Afraid the fillies will become enlightened.

THOMAS: There's nothing wrong with a lady gathering flowers, pressing them or even drawing a likeness. There's a deal wrong with them classifying them.

BICKNELL: Why?

THOMAS: Because that is not where their attributes and aptitudes lie. And if they're encouraged to go beyond the bounds of what God and their physiology determines there can only lie at best disappointment and more probably humiliation.

EDGEWORTH: Not to mention a chap waiting in his study for his wench to attend to his needs.

THOMAS: Well – what sort of lady would go scrabbling about looking at rocks in the Peak District.

EDGEWORTH: Here's the top and the bottom of the women of Lichfield – lovely bottoms in most cases.

THOMAS: For heavens sake, Richard.

EDGEWORTH: There's Anna Seward, handsome and bright.

THOMAS: Too clever?

EDGEWORTH: Clever enough to engage a man in intelligent conversation – if a bit challenging.

THOMAS: Oh...

EDGEWORTH: Then there's Honora Sneyd – not to mention her half sisters. An angel... Angels all.

THOMAS: Beauty is skin deep.

EDGEWORTH: Honora has an interest in science.

THOMAS: What on earth for?

BICKNELL & EDGEWORTH LAUGH.

THOMAS: Is there something so comical in a man wanting to find a wife, a partner for life, who can keep him content, can provide sufficient wit and intellect to engage in meaningful conversation, without her deluding herself that she is either a blue stocking, a harlot, a skivvy or a mere piece of ornamentation – desperate for every man to eye her up and down with sideways looks.

BICKNELL: I think my ideal wife would be all of those things..

EDGEWORTH: You'll have a long time waiting Johnny.

BICKNELL MIFFED.

EDGEWORTH: I wonder if you both ain't frightened of real women.

THOMAS: Frightened!

EDGEWORTH: You won't sanction use of the rod to keep them in check.

BICKNELL: It is perfectly legal so long as it's girth is no greater than that of a thumb.

THOMAS: Of course I wouldn't beat my wife.

EDGEWORTH: But you want her to be your obedient servant.

THOMAS: Not servant, wife.

EDGEWORTH: You want her to do as you bid.

THOMAS: Yes... no... yes...

EDGEWORTH: And you are afraid that without sanctions – a woman – with all her allure, the scent of, the wiles of, the touch of, the warmth of – she might some day desert you, cuckold you or nag, scold and harangue you to an early grave, having the full benefit of your fortune. Or worse than all that – match you. Be an equal.

THOMAS: I want... I want her to make me happy...

EDGEWORTH: Don't we all.

THOMAS: But for her to be happy also in doing that.

THERE'S A PIERCING SCREAM. LUCRETIA, AGITATED, APPEARS FOLLOWED BY HYSTERICAL SABRINA. SABRINA'S NIGHTGOWN HAS A VIVID BLOOD STAIN ABOUT HER MIDDLE. SHE LOOKS AT IT, SHAKING. THOMAS RUNS TO LUCRETIA & GRABS HER ROUGHLY.

THOMAS: What have you done!

BLACKOUT. END OF ACT 2, SCENE 3.

ACT TWO, SC 4

AVIGNON, THE GARDEN. NEXT MORNING.
LUCRETIA, IN HER DAY CLOTHES, SITS DEEP IN THOUGHT.
SABRINA EMERGES, ALSO IN HER DAY CLOTHES.
SHE WALKS UNEASILY.

SABRINA: Have the gentlemen gone?

LUCRETIA: You gave 'em the shock of their lives. They've gone seeing the sites. Well they didn't want to have to get an eyeful of all sorts gushing out of what you should keep private.

SABRINA: I'm so ashamed.

LUCRETIA: So you should be.

SABRINA: I thought I was bleeding to death.

LUCRETIA: No such luck.

SABRINA: It's still bleeding.

LUCRETIA: There's hope yet.

SABRINA: Where's Mr Day?

LUCRETIA: Grieving the loss of his finest silk cravat cos I had to use it for a rag for you.

SABRINA: Oh dear.

LUCRETIA: I ain't washing it for you...

SABRINA: What's happening to me?

LUCRETIA: You've got the curse... the curse of Eve...

SABRINA: I'm cursed!

LUCRETIA: Good and proper.

SABRINA: I try to be good.

LUCRETIA: Dun't make no difference now – you're cursed 'til you're an old bag of 40. Every month you'll bleed for a week and have belly-ache.

SABRINA: 'til I'm 40 years of age...

LUCRETIA: If you live that long – if you're unlucky enough to do that...

SABRINA: The bleeding will stop then?

LUCRETIA: Yes, cos your womb will rot and drop out of your fanny... Then what use will you be to any man, gentleman or not...

SABRINA: Oh lor... what can I do?

LUCRETIA: Get yourself a good stock of rags – but don't use the masters best neck tie next time.

SABRINA: Oh lor... no, I won't. What must he think of me?

LUCRETIA: He must think what's true. (GRAND AS SHE CAN) The Master...

SABRINA: You never call him "The Master".

LUCRETIA: (CONTS) Our LORD and Master...

SABRINA: Oh lor.

LUCRETIA: ...was a-entertaining his gentlemen hassociates, acquaintancing them with a fine French cuisinical dinner, I was going to serve at table like a lady in waiting to the King himself – even if he is daft as a brush.

SABRINA: Lucretia! That's blasphemy...

LUCRETIA: It's the truth. The gentlemen said.

SABRINA: I would have served table nicely too.

LUCRETIA: Oh yes, course you would – 'til you ruined their porter and cigars by appearin' with the contents of your cunt for all to see.

SABRINA: Don't say that.

LUCRETIA: I was there. I saw it. They saw it. The whole world saw it. They'll hear about it in London – in Lichfield I dare say.

SABRINA: Oh what must Mr Day think of me...

THOMAS RETURNS – HE'S RETURNING FROM TOWN, HE CARRIES A COUPLE OF BUNCHES OF FLOWERS BEHIND HIS BACK. WE MIGHT NOT SEE THEM.
SABRINA TURNS AWAY, SHAME-FACED.

THOMAS: Girls...

SABRINA: I'm so...

THOMAS: Not until I'm finished, Sabrina.

BEAT.

THOMAS: Girls... or is it ladies... Lucretia...

LUCRETIA: I didn't soil nothing, sir.

THOMAS: No – you acted in a calm and sober way.

LUCRETIA: Did I, sir?

THOMAS: Mr Edgeworth got me to see it. Yes, we were all shocked – Mr Bicknell deposited the contents of his stomach over the hedge...

SABRINA: Oh lor...

THOMAS: But Mr Edgeworth – who is worldly wise when it comes to female kind, especially in those regions, explained. Whilst Mr Bicknell protested it was not a sight a gentleman expected to spectate after travelling half way across Europe...

SABRINA: Deary me...

THOMAS: (CONTS) ...even he had to concede it could have been far worse – if it had not been for you, Lucretia – you acted in a thoroughly appropriate way – you attended to the... the... mess....

LUCRETIA: I'm sorry about your cravat...

THOMAS: It counts for nothing – finest Huguenot woven silk it might be. You cleared the mess – then consoled your innocent sister with kindness.

LUCRETIA: I... (BEAT) I did only my duty, sir.

THOMAS: You did far more than that.

HE HANDS HER A BUNCH OF FLOWERS.

THOMAS: I'm sorry for misjudging you.

HE KISSES HER ON THE FOREHEAD.
GENUINELY MOVED SHE SNIFFS THE FLOWERS.

LUCRETIA: No-one's given me flowers... or kindness... or a gentle kiss.

THOMAS: (BACKS OFF) Find a pot and put them in.

LUCRETIA: I will, I want them to last forever.

SHE LEAVES SLOWLY, SNIFFING THE FLOWERS. THOMAS TURNS TO SABRINA.

SABRINA: Please don't punish me, sir...

LUCRETIA STOPS TO SEE WHAT HAPPENS.

THOMAS: I'm not going to punish you, sweet child – sweet young woman...

SLIGHTLY HE HANDS SABRINA THE OTHER BUNCH OF FLOWERS – LARGER.

THOMAS: ...for that's what you are.

SABRINA: I'm cursed!

THOMAS: You carry the burden of all women – but you can only carry that burden if you are a woman. Now you are...

SABRINA: I don't understand.

THOMAS: When all girls reach a certain age. When they become a woman – the signal is unmistakable.

HE NODS TO HER GROIN.

SABRINA: I'm not cursed?

THOMAS: No more than the rest of your kind.

SABRINA: Surely all girls... women... even ladies don't.... (POINTSDOWN BELOW)

THOMAS: Take the flowers, Sabrina.

SHE TAKES THEM.

SABRINA: Thank you, sir. (TO LUCRETIA) Aren't they beautiful?

LUCRETIA DOESN'T ANSWER

SABRINA: I'm a woman! Mr Day says I'm a woman. (BEAT) Are you a woman yet?

LUCRETIA: These flowers are wilting...

SHE GOES.
BLACK OUT.

END OF ACT TWO, SC 4.

ACT TWO, SCENE 5

AVIGNON.

A SIMPLE BEDROOM. THREE MONTHS LATER.

LUCRETIA IN A SPOT LOOKS AT HERSELF IN AN INVISIBLE MIRROR TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE. SHE'S CONVINCING HERSELF THAT SHE'S BECOMING MORE WOMANLY. THEN SHE SPOTS SOMETHING ON HER FACE AND EXAMINES THE BLEMISH MORE CAREFULLY. CONCERNED FOR A MOMENT BUT DISTRACTED WHEN SABRINA ENTERS WITH SOME STRIPS OF LINEN.

SABRINA: The rags dried so quickly in the sun.

LUCRETIA: So long as you washed mine as well as yours.

SABRINA: (YES) I'm sure you're pleased you're a lady like me – now you're cursed too.

LUCRETIA: Yes, but you only came a woman 3 months ago – I'm younger than you so I came a lady first.

SHE GOES BACK TO THE MIRROR AND EXAMINES HER FACE.

SABRINA: (MUSING) I feel tired.

LUCRETIA: Who doesn't – we get up at sparrer's fart (MIMICS THOMAS) "It prepares you for a woman's duties. You can prepare the master's breakfast."

SABRINA: (SHE COMES OVER TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR AS THEY TALK) I like getting up early – it's quiet... the birds sing to me.

LUCRETIA: Well, don't moan you're tired then.

SABRINA: I am.

LUCRETIA: You've washed a handful of rags, that's all.

SABRINA: What's that on your face?

LUCRETIA: Nothing.

SABRINA: That mark...

LUCRETIA: It's a thingy. A pimple.

SABRINA: It looked like a pustule.

LUCRETIA: What's a pustule?

SABRINA: The matron at the foundling hospital was always going on about bubos, pustules and pox.

LUCRETIA: I ain't got the pox. I've seen enough of the pox – nob rot, fanny rot, nose rot, you go mad – and I ain't mad. I'm clean. Clean as I've been all my life-long days.

SABRINA: It's just a pimple then...

LUCRETIA: Yes, well don't go on to Mr Day cos I've got a little pimple.

SABRINA: It's not that little.

LUCRETIA: Don't say nothing.

SABRINA: (POINTS TO LUCRETIA'S FACE) That one there's just a little one.

LUCRETIA REALISES THERE'S ANOTHER SPOT ON HER FACE.

LUCRETIA: I suppose you never get them... (SPOTS ONE ON SABRINA'S ARM) See – you've got one there.

SABRINA: At least it's not on my face.

LUCRETIA: I'll give you worse on your face.

SABRINA: Spotty!

THEY LAUNCH INTO A FIGHT.

LUCRETIA: Pox, scabby, slut, slattern...

SABRINA: Pustule, pustule, pustule...

HEARING THIS THOMAS ENTERS.

THOMAS: What on earth...

HE GRABS SABRINA'S ARM.

LUCRETIA: She called me a pustule.

THOMAS: Sabrina – I'm ashamed of you.

SABRINA: I washed her rags.

LUCRETIA: Don't be disgusting! Tell her not to be disgusting, Mr Day.

THOMAS: (TO SABRINA) Don't be disgusting, Sabrina.

HE SPOTS THE BLEMISH ON SABRINA'S ARM.

THOMAS: What's that?

LUCRETIA: A pustule.

SABRINA: A gnat bite, sir.

LUCRETIA: A flea bite more like. Ew, you're all cooty.

SABRINA: It's not as bad as the pock marks on her face.

LUCRETIA GOES FOR HER AGAIN.

LUCRETIA: You wicked bumpkin!

AS THOMAS RESTRAINS LUCRETIA HE NOTICES THE MARKS ON HER FACE.

THOMAS: Oh lordy lordy lordy.

HE BACKS OFF.

LUCRETIA: I ain't gone ugly have I, Mr Day?

SABRINA: No uglier than you were before Mr Edgeworth and Mr Bicknell admired me.

THOMAS: (CUTS IN) Shut up, Sabrina.

SABRINA: Sorry sir... I'm fatigued. You always say that when a certain person gets fractious.

LUCRETIA: I'm not fucking fractious.

SABRINA: You said, Mr Day, it was because we were fatigued or that certain time of the month.

THOMAS ISN'T LISTENING, HE WANTS TO GET CLOSE TO LUCRETIA'S FACE AND SABRINA'S ARM TO EXAMINE THEM MORE CLOSELY, BUT BACKS OFF.

THOMAS: Pox...

LUCRETIA: Don't be cruel... I'm clean... And she's got 'em and a fellow has never even looked at her...

SABRINA: Mr Edgeworth...

THOMAS: You've got the pox – and it ain't pox pox, or chicken pox – it's small pox.

THEY TAKE IT IN.

THOMAS: Oh – what’s to become of me.

HE LEAVES.

LX CHANGE.

TRANSITION TO A WEEK LATER.

EACH GIRL LIES LISTLESS ON THEIR BEDS. THEY WILL HAVE
POCKS ON THEIR FACE AND ARMS. A SENSE THE CURTAINS ARE
PART CLOSED.

THOMAS ENTERS. HE’S DISTRACTED. HE CARRIES A SMALL JAR
OF LOTION AND A BOOK HE WAS READING BEFORE THE
DOCTOR LEFT. HE’LL KEEP HIS DISTANCE.

LUCRETIA: That doctor was horrible.

THOMAS: Of course he wasn’t.

LUCRETIA: Gabbling in gibberish.

THOMAS: He’s French and it wasn’t gibberish.

SABRINA: When will we get better?

THOMAS: Soon.

SABRINA: Supposing we die.

LUCRETIA: I ain’t dying even if you are.

BEAT.

SABRINA: Why have you taken the mirror away.

THOMAS: (LIES) Because you waste too much time gazing into it.

LUCRETIA: I know why – because we look like them stone faces stuck on St Martin’s
church – bits missing and green stuff hanging off.

THOMAS: It’s “those” stone gargoyles – not “them”.

SABRINA: Do we, Mr Day? Have we lost our youth?

THOMAS: Not your youth...

LUCRETIA: I’ve seen them as had small pox – faces like a bowl of gruel that’s been left in
the street and shitted on by rats.

THOMAS: Do you really think God will heal you if you spew such profanity.

LUCRETIA: Yes, well if he can cure us he must have caused it. He must've decided that when the spots stop being red and yellow, they turn into grey scabby holes which stay there for ever... Go on ask him.

SABRINA: They don't do they, Mr Day?

THOMAS: This lotion the doctor left will help.

SABRINA: Put some on now, Mr Day.

THOMAS: Me! Audrey will do it.

LUCRETIA: Her! She never even talks to us. Now she shoves the tray in at the door and scuttles off...

THOMAS: Because you insult her.

LUCRETIA: I surmise it was her who gave us the pox...

THOMAS: No, she didn't.

LUCRETIA: (CONTS) ...and now we're left ugly as sin.

SABRINA: The lotion – please put the lotion on.

HE HESITATES.

LUCRETIA: You don't want to catch it, do you?

THOMAS: I wasn't created to be a nursemaid.

LUCRETIA: I knew you didn't.

THOMAS: Where would you be if I was confined to my sickbed... Where would I be?

SABRINA: We could do it – for each other.

THOMAS: What a wonderfully Christian act, Sabrina...

HE HANDS OVER THE JAR AT ARMS LENGTH AND IS KEEN TO GO.

SABRINA: (SUDDENLY) Read to us...

HE LOOKS.

SABRINA: Please, sir... read from your book... We've hardly seen any daylight for days.

LUCRETIA: Yes, read to us, sir. I've had to tolerate nothing but her moaning for more days and nights than you'd care to think about.

THOMAS: I've had to listen to you BOTH moaning.

SABRINA: Do read to us...

BEAT.

THOMAS: So long as you apply the cream as the physician directed... quietly.

LUCRETIA: What – touch each other.

THOMAS: Unless you want to look like a gargoyle on St Martin's for the rest of your days...

LUCRETIA: (TO SABRINA) Do me first.

THOMAS FINDS A BOOK FROM HIS POCKET – “EMILE” BY ROUSSEAU OF COURSE. SABRINA CAREFULLY THEN GENTLY PREPARES TO APPLY CREAM TO LUCRETIA. SHE'S ABOUT TO START ON HER ARMS.

LUCRETIA: Do my face, you silly mare!

THOMAS IS ALREADY ENGROSSED IN THE BOOK WHICH HE SCANS THROUGH.

SABRINA: Read to us, Mr Day.

THOMAS: Very well.

SABRINA: The book is nice and thick.

THOMAS: I'm not going to read it all – I'll need air – clean fresh air.

LUCRETIA: If you'd taught us to read we could have read it ourselves.

THOMAS: I've taught you sufficient...

SABRINA: Please read to us.

THOMAS: I'll read the prescient points.

LUCRETIA: What's that mean?

THOMAS: But then again...

SABRINA: Is it a story book?

THOMAS: Yes.

SABRINA: Read us the story.

LUCRETIA: Are you applying this lotion or not?

SABRINA DABS SOME CREAM ON LUCRETIA'S FACE. LUCRETIA FLINCHES.

LUCRETIA: Careful – you nearly took my eye out.

THOMAS: (CONCEDES) This is a story – “Emile” – by Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

SABRINA: Is Emile a boy or a girl?

THOMAS: A boy...

LUCRETIA TUTS.

THOMAS: He has written a companion piece – “Sophie”.

SABRINA: That's a girl.

LUCRETIA: Give her a bun!

SABRINA: Can we have the story about a girl. Tell us about Sophie.

THOMAS: I've only got Emile to hand.

LUCRETIA: He'll have to do then.

THOMAS READS FROM EMILE. KEEPING HIS DISTANCE FROM THE GIRLS, INCREASINGLY ENGROSSED IN THE BOOK, HE PACES, A SENSE HE KNOWS IT BY HEART AND BECOMES DECLAMATORY – OBLIVIOUS TO THEIR INCREASING BEMUSEMENT, THEN BOREDOM. LUCRETIA MIMICKING HIM TO RELIEVE THE TEDIUM.

THOMAS: (READS) Emile. Book one.
God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil. He forces one soil to yield the products of another, one tree to bear another's fruit. He confuses and confounds time, place, and natural conditions. He mutilates his dog, his horse, and his slave. He destroys and defaces all things; he loves all that is deformed and monstrous; he will have nothing as nature made it, not even man himself, who must learn his paces like a saddle-horse, and be shaped to his master's taste like the trees in his garden. Yet things would be worse without this education, and mankind cannot be made by halves. Under existing conditions a man left to himself from birth

would be more of a monster than the rest. Prejudice, authority, necessity, example, all the social conditions into which we are plunged, would stifle nature in hand and put nothing in her place.

SABRINA LAUGHS AT LUCRETIA'S ANTICS. HE'S FURIOUS.

THOMAS: How dare you.

SABRINA: We haven't the learning to follow it.

THOMAS: Neither will you have if you don't pay attention.

LUCRETIA: Don't you know no stories about giants or King Arthur?

HE DOESN'T REPLY.

SABRINA: Is Mr Rousseau saying men destroy god's work.

THOMAS: Yes, he is...

SABRINA: And children should be free as nature intended.

THOMAS: Very good Sabrina. (TO LUCRETIA) You should take notice.

LUCRETIA: Yes well, if she's so clever she can 'splain to me why God's covered us in scabs. An' why if we're supposed to be free we have to do only what you tells us.

SABRINA: Lucretia.

LUCRETIA: Tell me then. (TO THOMAS) Tell me.

THOMAS SLAMS THE BOOK DOWN AND GOES TO LEAVE.

THOMAS: Apply the medicaments – and then say your prayers.

LUCRETIA: (SHOUTS AFTER HIM) It hasn't done me any good so far. You don't know how hard I've prayed. Since I could speak... when I've been starved, sick, cold, whipped – or treated like a piece of shit. No-one listens... Not even you, Mr Thomas Day.

SHE CATCHES SABRINA'S ACCUSING LOOK.

LUCRETIA: Well, he doesn't... You know he doesn't...

LX CHANGE.

THE SCENE TRANSFORMS FROM DARK BEDROOM TO SUNNY GARDEN, A MONTH OR TWO LATER.

LUCRETIA AND SABRINA NOW IN SIMPLE DAY CLOTHES. SABRINA STILTINGLY READS "EMILE" (WHICH THOMAS LEFT PREVIOUSLY).

BOTH WILL SIT FACING UPSTAGE SO WE AREN'T SURE WHETHER THE SMALL POX HAS LEFT FACIAL SCARS.

- SABRINA: (READS) "Should the sense of the tasks you set your little girls, but keep them busy. Idleness and insubordination are two very dangerous faults, and very hard to cure when once established. Girls should be attentive and industrious, but this is not enough by itself; they should early be accustomed to restraint. This misfortune, if such it be, is inherent in their sex, and they will never escape from it unless to endure more cruel sufferings."
- LUCRETIA: Blimey – it's worse than toothache listening to you. (TAKING BOOK) Give it here. (READS. NOT WELL BUT A BIT BETTER THAN SABRINA) "All their life long, they will have to submit to the strictest and most enduring restraints, those of propriety." (GIVES UP) It's like the bible this – only worse.
- SABRINA: (RE HER ARM) I've got one tiny scar left...
- LUCRETIA: You're lucky then.
- SABRINA: You don't have any.
- LUCRETIA: We're both lucky then.
- SABRINA: You don't sound happy. You should be happy. We both should...
- LUCRETIA: If we was pock-marked and ugly I'd be happy...
- SABRINA LAUGHS.
- LUCRETIA: He wouldn't have to choose – he'd send us both packing.
- SABRINA: Monsieur Rousseau says it doesn't do for a woman to be too beautiful. It turns their heads. A kindly countenance is what is admired.
- LUCRETIA: My Aunt Fanny it is – no matter what those pious men say. All they all want is a young round arse, a trap like a rose – and tits like chapel hat pegs!
- SABRINA: Can I make a confession?
- LUCRETIA: You best find yourself a cat'lick priest.
- SABRINA: I wanted you to stay pock-marked...
- LUCRETIA GENUINELY SHOCKED.
- SABRINA: I have prayed for forgiveness for even thinking it.
- LUCRETIA: And I hope God told you you could rot in hell.

SABRINA: No.

LUCRETIA: So what did he say?

SABRINA: Nothing.

LUCRETIA: You're still a selfish rotten mare.

SABRINA: I'm sorry. (BEAT) Do you think Mr Day will notice this little scar? (ON HER ARM)

LUCRETIA: Course he will.

SABRINA: He'll choose you then.

LUCRETIA: I thought you said looks didn't matter.

SABRINA: I thought you said they did.

CAPTAIN: (FRENCH) What have we here? What's this I see?

LUCRETIA: Who the fuck's that? A Frenchy to boot.

THE GIRLS CLING TOGETHER.

CAPTAIN: (ENGLISH, OOV) Ah – the famous English petites filles...

THE CAPTAIN APPEARS. HIS SWORD IN HAND, FULL FRENCH MILITARY UNIFORM. HE'S BEEN PRACTISING HIS STROKES.

SABRINA: May we assist you, Monsieur?

LUCRETIA: What are you on about – he's a French frog.

CAPTAIN LAUGHS.

SABRINA: Don't run her through with your sabre.

CAPTAIN: It's an epe.

SABRINA: Don't run her through all the same.

LUCRETIA: Do your worst, Frenchy.

BEAT.

CAPTAIN: You live with the crazy Englishman?

SABRINA: Yes... No... We live with Mr Day.

LUCRETIA: Are we famous in these parts?

CAPTAIN: Infamous.

SABRINA: (PLEASED) We're infamous, Lucretia – which must be even better than being famous.

LUCRETIA: Don't take no account of her, sir – she's from the county of Salop.

CAPTAIN: People in the village say you have been... mal... ill... sick.

LUCRETIA: If only you knew – our faces nearly dropped off... She's still got a scab that'll mark her for life.

SABRINA: It's only on my arm – if I wear long gloves.

CAPTAIN: You are both tres – both very beautiful.

SABRINA: (QUIET) He says we're both...

LUCRETIA: (QUIET) I heard. (TO CAPTAIN) What's your game, Monsieur!

CAPTAIN: My game. I hoped to find a quiet place to play with my weapon.

LUCRETIA, THEN SABRINA, LAUGH.

LUCRETIA: (RE SABRINA) She ain't as innocent as she makes out.

CAPTAIN: Would you like to handle it?

BOTH GIRLS HESITATE.

LUCRETIA: Show us what you can do with it?

HE GOES THROUGH A STANDARD FENCING ROUTINE, GETTING CLOSE. BOTH ARE IMPRESSED. SABRINA CLAPS.

CAPTAIN: You like?

SABRINA: It was marvellous.

LUCRETIA: You want to mind you don't cut something off carrying on like that.

HE LAUGHS.

SABRINA: Would you come closer, sir.

LUCRETIA: What!

SABRINA: So I might examine your blade. We haven't seen our reflections for such a long time. Our master has forbidden mirrors since we had the fever. And my sister can't always be relied upon.

LUCRETIA: Not relied on – you cow!

SABRINA: Our master will not be our master if we are disfigured.

CAPTAIN: Did he say that! I thought Englishmen were gentleman.

LUCRETIA: Are we ugly as sin?

CAPTAIN: No.

LUCRETIA: Tell us straight, Monsieur - Do I look like un gargoyle?

HE LAUGHS. LUCRETIA MOVES TO HIM.

LUCRETIA: Tell me the truth of it.

CAPTAIN: Of course you don't, you look nice... formidable... See... (HE HOLDS THE SWORD CLOSE TO HER SO SHE CAN SEE HER REFLECTION.

LUCRETIA: Not bad. (BEAT) She looks like a monster though don't she?

CAPTAIN GOOD HUMOUREDLY MAKES THE MOST OF IT.

CAPTAIN: It's hard to tell from here.

SABRINA HESITANTLY MOVES TO HIM.

LUCRETIA: Go on – he ain't going to run you through. (TO CAPTAIN) I won't tell on you if you do.

SABRINA GOES TO HIM.
HE PARTS HER HAIR GENTLY WITH THE SWORD.

CAPTAIN: Gargoyle...

SABRINA: Oh woe is...

CAPTAIN: Never. You are beautiful.

LUCRETIA: She's got scabby arms!

CAPTAIN: You are both very nice girls. A little pale... but nice little girls.

LUCRETIA: If you must know we're not girls – we're young women.

SABRINA: We truly are – we gush from our fundamentals every month.

LUCRETIA: Don't tell him that. He'll puke like Mr Bicknell. (TO CAPTAIN) But we are women – women with prospects if you must know.

CAPTAIN: Let the prospects wait. Be girls. Happy little girls. I suspect there are as few happy children in England as there are in France. The poor are hungry, the rich are whipped into shape – the shape being powdered monstrosities.

LUCRETIA: The poor get whipped too.

CAPTAIN: Your master is cruel?

SABRINA: No, sir... Is he, Lucretia?

LUCRETIA: I don't know what he is.

SABRINA: But he isn't cruel.

LUCRETIA: No...

CAPTAIN: You are very lucky. I am lucky to have met you.

HE TAKES A HAND OF EACH.

CAPTAIN: You don't mind?

LUCRETIA: No... What you going to do?

CAPTAIN: A kiss...

LUCRETIA: Go on then.

CAPTAIN: On your pale hands.

SABRINA: I wouldn't want you to catch my pox... Monsieur.

HE KISSES EACH HAND, INTENDING TO GO – BUT THOMAS ARRIVES BACK.

THOMAS: Hey, sir.

CAPTAIN: Who, sir?

THOMAS: You, sir.

CAPTAIN: I was simply bidding them adieu.

THOMAS: Adieu, Monsieur! You lie, sir. Unhand them

SABRINA: He weren't doing anything.

THOMAS: "Wasn't" and you don't know a Frenchman.

LUCRETIA: He wasn't – but I know this Frenchman's got a sword. He'll cut you to ribbons, Mr Day.

THOMAS: Ha! Ribbons you say. We'll see about that.

DAY PULLS OUT A PISTOL FROM HIS COAT.

THOMAS: And this Englishman is not so foolish as to traverse foreign climes without a firing piece.

LUCRETIA: (IMPRESSED) Are you going to shoot him, Mr Day?

THOMAS: Yes...

CAPTAIN: I am sorry for intruding on your arrangement.

THOMAS: What d'you mean by that?

SABRINA: He speaks English better than you speak French, Mr Day.

LUCRETIA: He meant us no harm.

CAPTAIN: (LEAVING) Bonne chance, my little gargoyles.

AS HE TURNS HIS BACK TO GO THOMAS RAISES THE PISTOL AT HIM.

THOMAS: Stay.

SABRINA: Don't shoot him, sir.

THOMAS: I'm an Englishman – I wouldn't shoot him in the back. I challenge you to a duel, sir.

CAPTAIN: Why?

THOMAS: Why? For intending to sully these innocents.

CAPTAIN: (LAUGHS) Me?

THOMAS: (COULD SHOOT) Fight, you French dog.

LUCRETIA: Monsieur Rousseau is French, sir.

SABRINA: And M Rousseau loves the children...

CAPTAIN TURNS TO FACE THOMAS.

CAPTAIN: You admire Rousseau, sir.

LUCRETIA: He's read "Emile"... and "Sophie", ain't you Mr Day?

DAY DOESN'T ANSWER.

CAPTAIN: And "The Social Contract".

SABRINA: Mr Day hasn't read that one to us yet.

THOMAS: This is not a debating society in a London coffee house.

CAPTAIN: One day I hope to be part of a movement that will turn this country on its head – and the ideas of Rousseau will inspire many. But – there's one thing I don't understand. Perhaps Mr Day could explain how all of Jean-Jacques' many children have ended up in orphanages?

LUCRETIA & SABRINA LOOK TO THOMAS. THE CAPTAIN BOWS THEN LEAVES.

THOMAS: (CALLS) Choose your weapons, sir...

THE CAPTAIN HAS GONE.

THOMAS: Coward.

LUCRETIA: He might have cut you from stem to stern, Mr Day.

THOMAS: He wouldn't be the first I've challenged.

LUCRETIA: You won a duel!

THOMAS: The other cove didn't have the grace to show up.

SABRINA: (CUTS IN) Is it true, sir, what the officer said about M Rousseau?

THOMAS: What does he know?

LUCRETIA: He seemed to know a lot.

THOMAS: Knowing more than you two doesn't amount to knowing much.

SABRINA: Sorry.

LUCRETIA: So did he stick his children in a foundling hospital or the likes?

THOMAS: Whether he did or he didn't doesn't account for anything – a man can have grand ideas which will better the world, it don't mean he has to be a saint.

LUCRETIA: But if everyone was like a saint to everyone else – 'specially the childers...

THOMAS: "Children".

LUCRETIA: ...the world would be better.

SABRINA: Do you intend to abandon us to our fates, Mr Day?

THOMAS: I'll tell you what I intend to do – leave this blessed country behind me...

LUCRETIA: Return to England?

THOMAS: (GRUMBLES ON) If it ain't military men being lewd....

LUCRETIA: He weren't.

THOMAS: "Wasn't". Or muttering maids... Or locals who say they've heard there's a crazy rich English gentleman who's concerned for slaves – then ask me for charity. Continually.

LUCRETIA: They'll be hungry.

THOMAS: So to England we return.

LUCRETIA: To London!

THOMAS: First to London to sort out my affairs – then to the clean air and light of Lichfield - where I can bask in the light of the true enlightenment.

SABRINA: I knew you wouldn't abandon us to our fates.

BEAT.

THOMAS: Of course. My whole intention was to place reason above fate. A belief, a conviction, that man need not be swept along by a tide of superstition, endowing his prospects to chance. That he might construct a world that is civilised. And I hope I've inculcated some of that in your young undeveloped minds. By being truthful...

LUCRETIA: So you ain't abandoning us?

THOMAS: ...by being truthful – so at no point did I promise or imply that either one – or even both would, necessarily, accompany me to my ultimate destination – not withstanding there would be benefits which you might accrue during the journey, the adventure, the voyage of discovery...

SABRINA: I don't understand.

LUCRETIA: I do. He's just said – we ain't going with him.

SABRINA: But Mr Day – you said that you were not going to abandon us.

BEAT.
THOMAS PRODUCES A LEGAL DOCUMENT.

THOMAS: Hardly abandon. This is an offer of an indenture to be apprenticed to a milliner...

LUCRETIA: Shop girls are no better than drabs – specially milliners – hat-makers are harlots is what I've heard.

THOMAS: Don't be ridiculous. (BEAT) And there's the indemnity of 300 guineas which goes with it.

SABRINA: To spend?

THOMAS: To pay for your wants.

SABRINA: Will we be apprenticed to a kind soul?

THOMAS: One of you will. I'm sure they will be kind.

SABRINA: (CUTS IN) One of us?

THOMAS TURNS AWAY.

THOMAS: That was the arrangement which Mr Bicknell duly documented – and I explained over a year ago.

LUCRETIA: (SUDDENLY) You scabby 'erbert!

SABRINA & THOMAS LOOK.

LUCRETIA: You poxy... poxy, poxy, piss-faced pox pustule of piss and pox juice.

SABRINA: Lucretia!

LUCRETIA: Don't "Lucretia" me.

SABRINA: The fever has affected her good sense.

LUCRETIA: (TO THOMAS) You know don't you! Which one of us... You've made up your mind.

BEAT.

THOMAS: If I hadn't decided this little outburst would have made up my mind.

LUCRETIA: I knew you'd decided – fuck-face!

SABRINA: Please... (TO THOMAS) Have you decided, sir?

LUCRETIA: Sir!

THOMAS: Yes... You will both return with me to England.

SABRINA: See – both of us, Lucretia.

FOR LUCRETIA, A GLIMPSE OF HOPE.

THOMAS: Where Lucretia will be placed in a situation she could not have dreamt of achieving less than two years ago – with a measure of financial security.

SABRINA: But what will become of me?

THOMAS: You will remain my ward - and the next stage of your education will continue.

SABRINA: Oh thank you, sir.

SHE GOES TO HUG HIM BUT STOPS HERSELF. THEY LOOK TO LUCRETIA. SHE IS IN A STATE OF SHOCK. THOMAS DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO BUT SABRINA INSTINCTIVELY GOES TO HER – BUT STOPS HERSELF. LUCRETIA HUGS HERSELF AND SHAKES. THEN SHE HOWLS.

LUCRETIA: Why, why, why...

THOMAS: It was our arrangement...

LUCRETIA: Why, why was I born? I had no contract with the bitch who dropped me or the fucker who fucked her. I had no arrangement with him who created me.

THOMAS: That's blasphemy...

LUCRETIA: I am the blasphemy of all creation. What made me something not a single soul could find it in their heart to love...

SABRINA & THOMAS KNOW NO WORDS CAN CONSOLE HER

BLACKOUT.
END OF SCENE 5.

ACT 2, SCENE 6.

LICHFIELD. 2 MONTHS LATER.

A PARLOUR OF A COMFORTABLE MIDDLE-CLASS HOME.

ANNA SEWARD SERVES TEA FOR SABRINA & HERSELF FROM A POT THAT HAS BEEN SET ON A TABLE.

SABRINA: (STANDING AWKWARDLY) Thank you, Miss Seward.

ANNA: Sit down or you'll spill it.

SABRINA: Sorry.

ANNA: And please do call me Anna.

SABRINA: Sorry, Miss Seward.

ANNA: "Anna". Go on – say it.

SABRINA STRUGGLES TO DO IT.

ANNA: I'm not about to bite you.

SABRINA: I know.

ANNA: I know, Anna.

SABRINA: I know – Anna.

ANNA: That's better isn't it.

SABRINA: I don't know, Miss Seward.

ANNA: Good grief.

SABRINA: Anna... (BEAT) It doesn't feel right – you serving me tea.

ANNA: I'm sorry – I forgot the biscuits. I'll ring for them.

SABRINA: No... no.

ANNA: Then what isn't right about me offering tea to my new friend.

SABRINA: Nothing.

ANNA: You've had friends before.

SABRINA: Yes, ma'am.

ANNA: Anna.

SABRINA: Lucretia was my friend – even if she was a little sharp with me. I think it was because she felt no-one ever loved her. I told her Mr Day loved her truly.

ANNA: (WRY) I'm sure he did...

SABRINA: Do you think he loves me?

ANNA: He better if he intends to make you his wife.

SABRINA: Yes.

ANNA: Does he tell you – that he loves you?

SABRINA: "Actions speak louder than words".

ANNA: What actions? What does he get upto?

SABRINA: I don't understand.

ANNA: You can tell me – as we're friends. What does he say – when he gets close to you.

SABRINA: Oh he doesn't get close. He's very punctilious.

ANNA: (LAUGHS) He's what?

SABRINA: He is most correct – in word and deed. I'm not ready yet – if I ever will be – for intimacy.

ANNA: Will he ever be?

SABRINA LOOKS.

ANNA: Disregard what I say – too many years here in Lichfield, embroidering, writing rambling gossipy letters. And waiting, like now, for the gentlemen to return to tell me about their latest interesting excursion.

SABRINA: It's a fine life you have.

ANNA: You think... (BEAT) And so Mr Day never shows you any... affection.

SABRINA: He's always most kind and proper.

ANNA: That's alright then...

BEAT.

SABRINA: What will become of me?

ANNA: Sorry?

SABRINA: What will become of me?

ANNA: You sound like a waif in a penny chap book. (MELODRAMATIC) “Oh what will become of me – good kind Christian sir...”

SABRINA: Are you making fun of me, miss?

ANNA: No. Why should I...

SABRINA: Lucretia wondered what would become of her... She always said it was best to expect the worst. Then you won't be disappointed. Not too disappointed.

ANNA: Maybe Lucretia was ungrateful – she's ended up in a more elevated position than she ever had a right to expect – even if it's only the drudge of a shopkeeper.

SABRINA: I'm sure she's grateful inside.

ANNA: As Thomas didn't choose her to be his partner for life it means he must have chosen you. So there's no question of what will “become of you”. It's decided.

SABRINA: Has he told you so?

ANNA: Well, no.

SABRINA: Oh...

ANNA: But that is the whole purpose of his grand plan.

SABRINA: So you truly believe I'm to be his...

ANNA: Charitable though he may be he hasn't collected waifs and strays out of the goodness of his heart. He wants a wife.

SABRINA: (SMILES) You truly believe I am to be his wife.

ANNA: That's better - the first time I've seen you smile. No man wants to wed a sour puss, do they?

SABRINA: Or a woman too clever.

ANNA: Oh no – we wouldn't want that would we!

THEY HEAR THE CHAPS RETURNING.

ANNA: But don't tell them I said.

SABRINA LAUGHS AS THOMAS, BICKNELL & EDGEWORTH ENTER RETURNING FROM A HIKE.

EDGEWORTH: I'm knackered...

THOMAS: Ladies, Richard...

EDGEWORTH: ...shagged out and shot...

ANNA: You had an invigorating exploration, gentlemen.

BICKNELL: Who'd have thought one would find beautiful gems in this barren place.

ANNA: Are you referring to us, sir!

BICKNELL EMBARRASSED. ANNA LAUGHS.

THOMAS: Blue John...

BICKNELL HOLDS UP A CHUNK OF BLUE JOHN CRYSTAL.

BICKNELL: ...found under these grit and lime stone hills.

THOMAS: I told you the Peak District would surprise you...

BICKNELL: It has, Tommy. (HOLDS UP THE STONE) See how it refracts the light. (TO SABRINA) See...

SHE HESITATES THEN TAKES THE STONE.

SABRINA: It's beautiful... (SHOWS ANNA) How beautiful.

ANNA: New-coming travellers bring them back from their Buxton picnics all the time. Collecting souvenirs is a growing occupation – isn't it, Thomas?

EDGEWORTH LAUGHS.

ANNA: Especially for you, Richard.

EDGEWORTH STOPS

LAUGHING.

SABRINA: It's lovely...

BICKNELL: Yes.

SABRINA: A lady could have a necklace of them.

THOMAS: Don't be so damn silly.

SABRINA HURT. BUT EDGEWORTH TAKES THE STONE.

EDGEWORTH: Yes – a lady could ornament herself quite nicely – Blue John, set in silver. It would enhance any fair maiden's appearance.

HE HOLDS IT AGAINST SABRINA'S FACE. SHE'S EMBARRASSED.

BICKNELL: Don't tease the poor girl.

THOMAS: (IRRITATED) It is beautiful only because it came from the earth. A divine gift. Part of life's mystery – why was it planted amongst the rocks of the Peak District?

ANNA: Dr Darwin says it's a chemical reaction – forming a crystal. He was also speculating how the fossils of creatures – sea creatures came to be embedded high in the hills.

THOMAS: Bishop Usher calculated the earth was between 4 and 5 thousand years old. And so any sea-life found on land must have been laid by the Great Flood.

EDGEWORTH: Bishop Usher and his like are talking out of their ecclesiastical arse holes.

SABRINA: I was told the Lord works in mysterious ways.

THOMAS: (IGNORES HER) ...But if the earth is little more than four thousand years old...

EDGEWORTH: Then Dr Darwin is wrong. But he is not wrong. Whilst we will strive to find the answers – any bloody fool who says the earth is so young or the old testament is gospel truth is a fool.

ANNA: A fool.

EDGEWORTH: A bloody big fool – and religions – papish, kingish or prophetish don't mean a flying fart... And so, Sabrina – to answer your point – which Mr Day ignored – it is not the Lord who works in mysterious ways – it is bloody clerics of all descriptions who claim to speak in his name.

BEAT.

SABRINA: The Blue John is truly beautiful.

EDGEWORTH: There we are. The real truth. Spoken in innocence. A gemstone placed against a young woman's fair skin. That is truly divine.

ANNA: Mr Edgeworth!

THOMAS: (LEAVING) I'm going to change my boots.

EDGEWORTH: Feelings are as much a fact as the stones in the earth, Thomas... That's what Rousseau tells us.

THOMAS: Rousseau also tells us that filling an impressionable girl's head with unnecessary facts AND facile frivolity is counter to nature.

HE LEAVES.

ANNA: Oh dear...

EDGEWORTH: Ah it's nothing – he's got a burr in his britches.

BICKNELL HOLDS UP THE SMALL CHUNK OF BLUE JOHN. HE LOOKS AT IT. SABRINA IS IN HIS SIGHT LINE BEHIND IT.

BICKNELL: Truly beautiful. A mystery.

ANNA: Yes... she is...

SABRINA SENSES SHE'S BEING CONTEMPLATED...

LX CHANGE.
SOME MONTHS LATER. THE SAME ROOM. EVENING.

LICHFIELD.
POLITE MUSIC & CHATTER CAN BE HEARD THROUGH A SLIGHTLY OPEN DOOR TO AN ADJOINING ROOM. THERE'S A SOCIAL EVENING OCCURRING – THE ONLY LIGHT IN THE PARLOUR COMING FROM THE HALF OPEN DOOR.

SABRINA SITS ALONE ON A HARD BACKED CHAIR. DRESSED SIMPLY AS EVER SHE'S ACHING TO BE PART OF WHAT'S HAPPENING AND SMILES IF SHE CATCHES A GLIMPSE OF PEOPLE ENJOYING THEMSELVES NEXT DOOR.
EDGEWORTH ENTERS FROM THE PARTY – STILL LAUGHING AND TALKING TO SOMEONE HE'S LEAVING.

EDGEWORTH: Don't worry, Honora – I'll be back – nature calls...

HE GOES TO PASS THROUGH THE PARLOUR THEN SPOTS SABRINA.

EDGEWORTH: My, my... Is it a house mouse I espy.

SABRINA: It's only me, Mr Edgeworth. Sabrina Sidney.

EDGEWORTH: I know who you are... Why the blazes he called you Sabrina Sydney I'll never know.

SABRINA: Sydney after his Whig hero, Sabrina to do with...

EDGEWORTH: (CUTS IN) The River Severn, yes, I know all that. (BEAT) Don't you like parties?

SABRINA: I don't know, sir.

EDGEWORTH: Don't know! I love 'em. Gaiety, laughter, fine food, lots of drink, beautiful young women.

SABRINA: Yes – the ladies are beautiful.

EDGEWORTH: Yes...

SABRINA: Have you brought little Dick?

EDGEWORTH: Good grief no. He's at home in Ireland with his mama. If I'd brought them here I'd be, well, not I, his governess, would be tweezing the splinters out of his arse after he slid across the floor – and I'd be pulling the splinters from my soul, aimed there by my good lady wife...

SABRINA: Oh, I see.

EDGEWORTH: No, you probably don't – but that's no bad thing.

SABRINA: Do you think Mr Day will mind if he finds me here watching?

EDGEWORTH: Oh hang him... (COLLECTS HIMSELF) Tell him it's part of your education. That you are studying how ladies conduct themselves.

SABRINA: I don't think he approves of ladies.

EDGEWORTH: Don't approve! They don't approve of him more like.

SABRINA: But he's so kind and wise.

EDGEWORTH: They don't approve of him – first, because he's a shambler. Have you seen him dance! But most of all it's because he wants them to change, to be what they ain't. Now – this is just between me, you and that door-post – I'd willingly change the present Mrs Edgeworth...

SABRINA: Sir!

EDGEWORTH: Why not? She's forever producing children then complaining she's sore and sad. Then whining that I'm either inventing or gallivanting. "Do you blame me, madam?" I've expostulated on many an occasion. "And leastways you won't be adding to the offspring tally and all your commensurate woes if I'm over the Irish sea..."

SABRINA: No...

EDGEWORTH: (COLLECTS HIMSELF) Mr Day likes women alright – my sister broke his heart. They were betrothed – she said wait ‘til she thought about it. He waited a britches busting year - then she turned him down flat! She didn’t fancy she could match up to his expectations.

SABRINA: Do you think I can?

EDGEWORTH: You? (BEAT) Yes, well I dare say you will.

SABRINA: You really think so?

EDGEWORTH: Well if not, young bucks will be queuing up for you. Me and Bicknell would be first in line I shouldn’t wonder.

SABRINA: I just want to make Mr Day a good companion.

EDGEWORTH: Yes – I suppose it’s better than you might have expected. But perhaps you were entitled to expect more.

SABRINA: I never expected anything. I’ve been warm and never hungry. I didn’t think in all my life that I’d be able to attend a gay party.

EDGEWORTH: You aren’t attending it.

SABRINA: I’m listening to the music. I can hear the folks laughing – not crying. A proper gentleman is talking to me – not shouting.

EDGEWORTH: I wish I was so easily pleased.

SABRINA: Miss Seward claims you are the life and soul of the party.

EDGEWORTH: Life maybe...

ANNA COMES THROUGH FROM THE PARTY.

ANNA: Ah there you are, Richard – we ladies are fluttering our fans in anticipation of your return.

EDGEWORTH: Oh let them dribble – while I talk to the most beautiful unplucked violet in the country.

ANNA: Richard!

SABRINA: Sir wasn’t being familiar.

ANNA: Sir was being an arse.

HE LAUGHS.

ANNA: Sir is like the rest of them – little boys in bulging britches – a pity their brains haven't developed at the same rate since puberty!

EDGEWORTH: You must have been taking instruction from the good Mrs E, Anna. (LEWD) I best water my horse.

ANNA: (LAUGHS) Dirty dog.

THOMAS & BICKNELL ENTER FROM THE PARTY – TALKING.

THOMAS: Me not dance!

BICKNELL: I could match you, Thomas – which ain't saying much.

THOMAS CONCERNED TO SEE SABRINA TALKING TO ANNA & EDGEWORTH.

THOMAS: What's going on?

SABRINA: I was only sitting... watching...

THOMAS: It is well past your bedtime.

ANNA: She was spying on us.

SABRINA: I wasn't Miss.

ANNA LAUGHS.

THOMAS: Just go to bed.

EDGEWORTH: It's a party!

BICKNELL: Hardly up to London standards.

EDGEWORTH: And if it was I still warrant the pair of you would still stand there like statues – and that's when your pretending to dance.

ANNA & SABRINA LAUGH.

EDGEWORTH: (CONTS TO THOMAS) Sabrina was watching what a fool you made of yourself.

SABRINA: I was not... Sorry, but I wasn't.

BICKNELL LAUGHS.

ANNA: And you're no better, Mr Bicknell.

THOMAS: Perhaps life does not depend on frivolities.

ANNA: Does not life need joy?

THOMAS: Of course, but true joy stemming from...

ANNA: (CUTS IN) Then shall we dance?

BICKNELL: I for one am not returning to the dancing room – to be mocked.

ANNA: We shall do it here then.

THOMAS: No we shall not.

SABRINA FEELS SHE SHOULD LEAVE. SHE CURTSIES TO GO.

SABRINA: Good evening ladies and gentlemen. (TO THOMAS) Please don't be too cross that I stayed past my bedtime.

EDGEWORTH GRABS HER ARM.

EDGEWORTH: You are going nowhere, young madam.

SABRINA LOOKS.

EDGEWORTH: You shall dance.

THOMAS: Edgeworth.

EDGEWORTH: "Edgeworth" nothing. (TO SABRINA) Miss Seward will show you that her fine limbs are as seductive as her tongue isn't – except in certain situations that I have yet to enjoy.

ANNA: Don't be rude.

EDGEWORTH LAUGHS.

BICKNELL: How can we dance without music?

"HEARTS EASE" CHIMES UP IN THE NEXT ROOM.
THEY WILL DANCE HEARTS EASE, AN ENGLISH COUNTRY
SQUARE DANCE FOR TWO COUPLES.

ANNA: Perfect – Hearts Ease.

EDGEWORTH: A good old English dance.

ANNA: Perhaps Thomas would prefer the newly fashionable quadrille, it coming from France.

SHE TRIES TO TAKE HIS HAND.

THOMAS: I'd prefer neither.

EDGEWORTH: Ah don't be a squashed prune, Tommy.

ANNA: (TAKES BICKNELL'S HAND) Then you will have to show me how the London gallant capers, John Bicknell.

SABRINA SHE ORGANISES HERSELF, BICKNELL, EDGEWORTH & UNSURE INTO A SQUARE. THOMAS DOESN'T KNOW WHAT IS MOST HUMILIATING – STAYING TO WATCH OR WALKING OUT. ANNA STARTS THE DANCE WHICH TAKES THE FOCUS OFF HIM. HE STAYS. A SENSE HE'S FASCINATED BY SABRINA'S YOUTHFUL VIGOUR AS SHE BECOMES INVOLVED – BUT IT'S AGAINST HIS BETTER JUDGEMENT. NB. RE THE DANCE. TO BE CHOREOGRAPHED AND ANNA WILL OCCASIONALLY TELL BICKNELL AND SABRINA THE NEXT MOVE. ANNA & EDGEWORTH LEAD IT. BUT IT'S SOON JOYFUL. SABRINA SHOULD AT POINTS COME CLOSE TO THE WATCHING THOMAS. SHE'S NOT AT ALL FLIRTATIOUS, BUT SHE'S INCREASINGLY HAVING FUN AND WOULD LIKE HIM TO SHARE IT. THE MUSIC CONTINUES.

ANNA: All hold hands.

EDGEWORTH: We know that.

BICKNELL: I don't.

SABRINA: Me neither.

EDGEWORTH (WITH SABRINA) AND ANNA (WITH BICKNELL) TAKE THE LEAD. SABRINA & BICKNELL SOON FORGET THEIR SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS. AS THE DANCE PROCEEDS.

EDGEWORTH: (TO THOMAS) See Tommy it's easy. (TO SABRINA) You're a partner to make any gent proud. Ain't she Tommy?

THOMAS: She's a child.

EDGEWORTH: We're all that at heart.

ANNA: You certainly are, Richard.

EDGEWORTH: You've been talking to Mrs Edgeworth.

SABRINA: (PASSING THOMAS) Do join in, Mr Day.

BICKNELL: Yes, come on, Tom.

ANNA: Yes, come on, Tom.

SABRINA: You could take my part.

EDGEWORTH: He could not – I'm not partnering him! You'll have me and him installed in a Molly House next.

THE MUSIC ENDS. THOMAS SHOCKED.

ANNA: What's a Molly House?

SABRINA: It's where men do buggery.

ALL ARE SHOCKED.

SABRINA: (LAME) Lucretia told me... (BEAT) What's buggery?

EDGEWORTH ROARS WITH LAUGHTER. THOMAS GIVES UP & GOES.

SABRINA: What have I done...

EDGEWORTH: Don't worry, you precious little thing. (TO BICKNELL) Come on – let's go and humour him.

BICKNELL BOWS FORMALLY TO ANNA & SABRINA (WHO'S SURPRISED) THEN FOLLOWS EDGEWORTH OUT.

SABRINA: Oh dear.

ANNA: You enjoyed the dance didn't you?

SABRINA: (NODS) Now I feel wicked.

ANNA: (PUTS HER ARM AROUND HER) You aren't wicked.

SABRINA: I try not to be.

BEAT.

ANNA: You will make a lot of enemies, Sabrina.

SABRINA: I know I can never be a true lady.

ANNA: You won't have enemies because of what you lack. People will find fault in you because of what they lack. It's always the way.

SABRINA: I'm sorry – I don't understand.

ANNA: I'm not sure many of them, of us, do. Be yourself – if you are happy with yourself – not at the expense of others – people will be happy with you.

SABRINA: I still don't understand.

ANNA: I'm sorry – I cannot make it simpler. Things never are.

A JIG STARTS IN THE NEXT ROOM. SABRINA LOOKS TO THE MUSIC THEN THE DEPARTED THOMAS.

END OF SCENE 6.

ACT TWO, SC 7

THE PEAK DISTRICT.

A FEW MONTHS LATER. A SENSE OF SPACE. PURPLE HEATHER, COLD BLUE SKIES. SABRINA RUNS ON, ENJOYING THE FREEDOM OF BEING OUTSIDE.

SABRINA: It's lovely, Mr Day. The air is cold and clean. But climbing up the hill has made me warm. No wonder, you and your gentlemen friends venture up here. No wonder... This earth... white stone – but soft stone. The grass is short with tiny purple flowers so sweet to smell. Oh Mr Day... I feel free as the little bird soaring in the cold blue air...

THOMAS ENTERS, KNACKERED FROM HIS CLIMB UP THE PEAK. SABRINA RUNS TO HIM.

SABRINA: Thank you, thank you, thank you... for bringing me out to the Pennine hills that you and your good friends talk so much about.

SHE HUGS HIM. THE HUG BECOMES A CLING. HE COULD RESPOND BUT DOESN'T.

SABRINA: Thank you.

A MOMENT THEN SHE REALIZES SHE SHOULD BACK OFF.

SABRINA: Isn't it marvellous?

THOMAS: Yes...

SABRINA: Clean and cold and beautiful.

THOMAS: Yes.

SABRINA: What's the matter?

THOMAS: What do you mean?

SABRINA: You don't seem happy.

THOMAS: I really don't think you are entitled to speculate on how I feel.

SABRINA: No... But I want you to be as happy as I am.

HE DOESN'T ANSWER.

SABRINA: I'm sorry – for hugging you. I was too familiar.

THOMAS: Yes, you were.

SABRINA: Miss Seward was right. She should have come as what she calls a chaperone.

THOMAS: Miss Seward is irrelevant.

SABRINA: Is what?

BEAT.

THOMAS: Your problem is, Sabrina, that your head is turned in too many directions – by the likes of Miss Seward and her friends.

SABRINA: She's nice to me. Better than I deserve, I know. And her friends – the Miss Sneyds, Miss Edgeworth, the Miss...

THOMAS: (CUTS IN) Don't you see – they are everything you shall not be.

SABRINA: Oh I know that.

THOMAS: Good.

SABRINA: I could never be as beautiful, as clever, as perfect...

THOMAS: They aren't perfect.

SABRINA: I thought...

THOMAS: For all their cleverness, their bits of learning, their ridiculous ambitions. They don't know their place in the order of things. It's in the Bible, it's in Rousseau, it's in everything through history and everything an educated man could read – if a woman doesn't know her rightful place, know that "place" is not lower than man's, like the brutes would have it. It's different. And a woman that can accept that, that she can make a true companion, will be truly content, possibly even happy – and the man in her life would be happy and content as a consequence.

SABRINA: Are you content or not, Mr Day?

THOMAS: My whole life being is intent on being content.

SABRINA: But you should be content.

THOMAS: I hardly think you are qualified to determine my spiritual state.

SABRINA: No...

THOMAS: No...

SABRINA: But you should be contenter than most people – even the King who has everything but all your friends say he’s a lunatic.

THOMAS: He is.

SABRINA: So you should be contenter even than the King himself.

THOMAS: I don’t believe “contenter” is a word.

SABRINA: I dare say Mr Samuel Johnson esquire would know.

THOMAS: What do you know of Samuel Johnson.

SABRINA: I listen to you and your fine friends – Mr Edgeworth, Mr Bicknell, Messers Boulton and Watt, Dr Darwin, Miss Seward, Miss Edgeworth, the Misses Honora and Elizabeth Sneyd...

THOMAS: Yes, well it don’t make me contenteder to know that you’re ear-wigging people who’ve been ear-wigging those who know better.

SABRINA: I couldn’t help... I thought it would make you contenteder...

BEAT.

THOMAS: Do you really think I should be content?

SABRINA: As content as a man could be until he’s found his true love.

THOMAS: Well, I’m not contented.

SABRINA: But even if you haven’t found your - you are so blessed.

THOMAS: Am I really?

SABRINA: You have fine friends.

THOMAS: Who sneer.

SABRINA: They don’t. And you have lots of money.

THOMAS: I dare say that's what you've got your heart set on. No doubt Lucretia planted that germ in your mind.

SABRINA: No, sir. I never expect to have money.

THOMAS TUTS.

SABRINA: I don't.

THOMAS: What do you want?

SABRINA: I have more than I should even now. Kindness.

THOMAS: I'm glad you are content.

SABRINA: But you, sir – if you don't mind me saying – you have... you are...

THOMAS: Yes?

SABRINA: You live a comfortable life without having to labour.

THOMAS: You expect me to work in a mill or a mine then.

SABRINA: No, sir. You are a gentleman. (BEAT) If you don't mind me asking how does a gentleman live comfortably without doing a job. I know Mr Bicknell is a lawyer. And Mr Wedgewood makes pots – or his men do. And Mr Watt plans great engines for Mr Boulton's men to make. And Dr Darwin ministers to the sick. Are they not real gentlemen, sir? Are they just tradesmen?

THOMAS: You don't need to know the whys and wherefores. It's the way it is.

SABRINA: Yes sir... (BEAT) God must really smile on you – making you a rich gentleman.

THOMAS: Mmm...

SABRINA: And it must make him happy that you tell them Americans they shouldn't put savages in chains and whip them.

THOMAS: Yes, I do believe he will – smile upon me.

SABRINA: So you must be a contented man. Who could wish for more?

BEAT.

THOMAS: I do wish for more. Not out of selfishness but to be complete.

SABRINA: A wife?

THOMAS: Yes...

SABRINA: To make you content and happy.

THOMAS: And she will only do that if she is attentive. If she can engage in intelligent conversation without fiddle-faddling with large ideas she cannot understand. A wife who fulfils herself by fulfilling all her husband's needs. To achieve which she cannot possibly have her head filled with nonsense about fashionable fripperies. A wife who doesn't fill her time complaining of minor ailments, mostly imagined.

SABRINA: Mr Edgeworth says Mrs Edgeworth is raddled with child-bearing.

THOMAS: Perhaps Mrs Edgeworth should be grateful that Mr Edgeworth has chosen her to plant his seed...

SABRINA: How do you mean, Mr Day?

THOMAS: Not more questions! I will tell you what you need to know. And burdening a husband with complaints about things that are part of a woman's constitution is a very bad thing. It's like a fellow complaining that it's dark at night-time.

SABRINA LAUGHS WHEN SHE GETS IT. HE'S IRRITATED.

THOMAS: The point is a good wife – a good woman of any description come to that – must be stoical.

SABRINA: Mr Day...

SHE STOPS HERSELF FROM ASKING THE QUESTION.

THOMAS: Go on.

SABRINA: I daresn't ask another question.

THOMAS: If it's a sensible one...

SABRINA: What's stoical?

THOMAS: Well, stoical is... I'll demonstrate it.

HE FINDS A CANDLE AND FLINT LIGHTER IN HIS POCKET.

SABRINA: Lor, Mr Day – you've got a candle and the sun's as bright as anything.

WIND HE LIGHTS THE CANDLE, POSSIBLY SHIELDING IT FROM FROM THE AND OUR VIEW – WHEN HE DROPS THE HOT TALLOW ON HER ARM. A MOMENT THEN SHE SHRIEKS. HE'S ALMOST AS SHOCKED AS SHE IS.

SABRINA: It wasn't an accident Mr Day. It was hot tallow.

THOMAS: It was also a demonstration of what being stoical isn't.

SABRINA: My arm is sore.

HE TURNS AWAY. BEAT.

SABRINA: It's not as sore now...

HE DOESN'T RESPOND.

SABRINA: Have I done wrong?

THOMAS: You wailed like a banshee...

SABRINA: It... It hurt.

THOMAS: Really...

SHE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT ELSE TO DO BUT FLICK THE SET TALLOW FROM HER ARM AND DEB THE SORE WITH HER FINGER, WETTED FROM HER MOUTH.

SABRINA: I won't shriek like a banshee next time, Mr Day. I'll be... stoical. I'll be as stoical as stoical can be. I'll be a brave young woman. And suffer in silence.

HE STILL DOESN'T ANSWER.
SHE GOES BACK TO HER ARM.
HE MOVES BEHIND HER. THEN TAKES THE PISTOL FROM INSIDE HIS COAT. HE COCKS IT. HE POINTS IT AT HER HEAD.
SHE KNOWS SOMETHING'S GOING ON BUT DOESN'T KNOW WHAT.
HE THEN RAISES THE GUN AND FIRES IT INTO THE AIR.
SHE SCREAMS, TURNS, STOPS HERSELF. SHE'S A QUIVERING WRECK.

SABRINA: I've failed you, Mr Day, haven't I? Sorry, it's another question... I was frightened. I'm sorry. I wasn't stoical enough. Shoot again, Mr Day.

LX CHANGE. A GRADUAL FADE FROM THE BRIGHT HOPEFUL PENNINE DAY TO A SOMBRE VESTIBULE.
IN THE HALF LIGHT A TRUNK IS DEPOSITED ON STAGE.
FORLORN SABRINA SITS ON IT, STILL CONFUSED.
SOME WAY OFF THOMAS, EDGEWORTH, BICKNELL & ANNA ENTER TO FORM A GROUP. THEY TALK AND MOSTLY IGNORE SABRINA – OCCASIONALLY GLANCING OVER AT HER.

ANNA: So it failed – your grand plan.

THOMAS: Why are you so smug?

ANNA: I am not smug – but you've patently failed.

EDGEWORTH: She's a fine looking girl – on the verge of womanhood.

ANNA: She isn't just fine looking. She's a good woman. A good person.

EDGEWORTH: So she is - what more could a man want – especially someone like you, Tommy – who for all your material assets can seem to charm your friends but not the ladies.

BICKNELL: Be quiet, Richard – you can see this is difficult for Thomas.

THOMAS: Yes, it is.

ANNA: So you have failed.

THOMAS: No. Well, yes...

ANNA: I knew it.

THOMAS: I failed in not realising that society had done its worst to her – to them both – before I could mould them.

BICKNELL: Rousseau proclaims that while children should never be pampered – grief, he even advocated plunging infants into ice cold water – they will realize their potentialities if left to nature.

THOMAS: Yes well “nature” is in precious little supply. (RE ANNA) People represent other half-baked ideas and notions – in talk or dress.

ANNA: Perhaps. But Sabrina and the other poor wretch were not pampered in early life.

EDGEWORTH: Certainly not – up on half those in Foundling hospitals die within a year or two according to Hogarth.

BICKNELL: Even that is better than the workhouses... You have served them well, Thomas.

ANNA: Because they haven't died!

THOMAS: I HAVE served them well.

BICKNELL: She does seem to be an intelligent lass...

THOMAS: How can she be when she cannot comprehend the simple requirements.

SABRINA: I can learn, Mr Day.

HE DOESN'T ANSWER.

BICKNELL: I'm sure the fine academy for young ladies that you will attend will equip you with the necessary accomplishments, Sabrina.

SABRINA: So when I come back a lady...

THOMAS: (CUTS IN) No! No...

SABRINA: No, sir?

THOMAS: No...

SABRINA: Never?

SHE GENTLY SOBS WHEN SHE GETS NO ANSWER.
BICKNELL ENCOURAGES THOMAS TO GO OVER. HE
RELUCTANTLY DOES BUT CANNOT GET ANYWHERE NEAR
TOUCHING HER.

THOMAS: You'll receive a generous dowry when you come of age...

SABRINA: Never?

THOMAS: (TURNING TO GO) The coach will be here shortly.

SABRINA: Never...

HE COULD ALMOST TOUCH HER SHOULDERS.
EDGEWORTH, ANNA & LASTLY BICKNELL EACH IN TURN GIVE
HER A SYMPATHETIC LOOK BEFORE THEY FOLLOW THOMAS.
THE LIGHTS FADE LEAVING SABRINA IN A SPOT.
THE FEAR WE SAW WHEN WE FIRST MET HER HAS RETURNED
BUT IT'S MORE NOW – DESOLATION AND NOT A LITTLE
BITTERNESS.

END OF ACT TWO.

EPILOGUE

ENGLAND 1789.

A MILLINER'S SHOP. SOME HATS ON DISPLAY.

A WOMAN, 30-ISH, WHICH THEN MIGHT BE CONSIDERED APPROACHING MIDDLE
AGE, SMOOTHS A ROLL OF FABRIC.

ANOTHER WOMAN OF A SIMILAR AGE ENTERS THE SHOP WITH HER OLDER
HUSBAND. THEY WOULD BE REGARDED AS A LADY & GENTLEMEN. SHE WEARS
DARK CLOTHES & LACE VEIL – NOT FULL FUNERAL, BUT MODEST MOURNING.

THE PERSON ATTENDING THE SHOP IS LUCRETIA. THE CUSTOMERS ARE SABRINA & BICKNELL. THERE WILL BE A MOMENT BEFORE WE AND THEY REALISE. LUCRETIA & SABRINA WILL NOW HAVE A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF POLISH – SUPERFICIALLY IN LUCRETIA’S CASE. BICKNELL WILL IN ANY EVENT BE BACK TURNED – A BORED MAN SHOPPING WITH HIS WIFE.

SABRINA: Excuse me...

LUCRETIA: Yes, Madam...

SABRINA: Would it be possible for you to make and finish a dress for me by Friday?

LUCRETIA: Friday?

SABRINA: (REFERRING TO HER HUSBAND) I'm sure we would remunerate you appropriately if you are required to employ additional craftswomen.

LUCRETIA: You'd have to.

SABRINA: So it's possible?

LUCRETIA: (DAWNING. BEAT) Fuck a fucking duck!

SABRINA: I beg your...

LUCRETIA: It's fucking you.

SABRINA: Lucretia?

LUCRETIA: I know who I am. But it's you, innit...

SABRINA: Lucretia. Oh Lucretia... (COULD HUG HER)

LUCRETIA: What d'you want?

SABRINA: A dress... I should introduce you to my husband.

LUCRETIA: Why would I want to be introduced to Mr Day. I met him and never did like what I saw. And if you must know I got myself a husband – and a shop as you can see. So I ain't 'plainin'. (BEAT) I certainly am not complaining...

SABRINA: (CUTS IN) I didn't marry Mr Day.

LUCRETIA: I knew he should've picked me. (BEAT) I'd have turned the barmy cove down if he had.

BICKNELL STIFFENS, BUT STILL NOT TURNING TO THE AUDIENCE OR LUCRETIA.

SABRINA: I am now Mrs Sabrina Bicknell...

LUCRETIA: Who?

BICKNELL TURNS TO LOOK AT LUCRETIA.

LUCRETIA: Fuck a duck. Sorry. Fuck a fucking duck. Mr fucking Bicknell.

BICKNELL: (OFFERS HIS HAND) Lucretia...

LUCRETIA: Sorry about the effing and jeffing... I've given it up... but seein' Sabrina doing a fair imitation of a lady. And then finding out she's hitched to you. It's enough to make even a respectable tradesperson like me forget my decorum.

BICKNELL: I'm sure. (TO SABRINA) If you could choose the material, dearest.

SABRINA: Yes, dearest.

LUCRETIA: So you want a dress. Is it for a special occasion?

BICKNELL: Yes, it is.

SABRINA: It's for Mr Day.

LUCRETIA LAUGHS.

BICKNELL: Sabrina intends wearing it for Mr Day's funeral.

LUCRETIA: He's snuffed it?

BICKNELL: Yes, he died tragically.

LUCRETIA: Fuck me... So he never did find his perfect wife – seeing as he didn't get you.

BICKNELL: He found a wife – perfect for him.

SABRINA: A dutiful wife.

BICKNELL: A slave.

LUCRETIA: He beat her!

SABRINA: Of course not. She did his bidding.

LUCRETIA: Yes well I'm like that with my old man and it didn't turn out too bad in the end. I own this place.

BICKNELL: You don't own it – a wife doesn't own anything.

LUCRETIA: Blimey – you’re still a man of the law.

SABRINA: John’s a good man. He respects me – which you never did.

LUCRETIA: (SHRUGS) So how did he go on to meet his maker then – Mr Day?

BICKNELL: Rousseau.

LUCRETIA: What, Rousseau did for him?

BICKNELL: Of course not.

SABRINA: Whilst Thomas’s wife was happy to do as he bade...

BICKNELL: She was a good wife...

SABRINA: His horse found it harder to appreciate the ideas of Mr Rousseau.

LUCRETIA: What are you on about?

BICKNELL: Thomas applied the teachings of Rousseau in training his horse...

LUCRETIA: I said he was barmy.

SABRINA: ...but the horse wasn’t as receptive as his wife. In fact the horse was more like you – “spirited” – it threw him and broke poor Mr Day’s back.

LUCRETIA: Killed him...

SABRINA: Stone dead. Then galloped off – free.

LUCRETIA: Free?

SABRINA: As free as a mare can ever be...

END

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