

“THE PERFECT WIFE”

BY RACHAEL CARNES

ESTIMATED RUNNING TIME — 90 MINUTES

CAST — SIX PERFORMERS

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SUMMARY

As revolution between England and its American colonies simmers, candy-colored Georgian society pits the woeful, starving masses against the excessive powers of the rich elite. One bright young man, Sir Thomas Day, rebuffed at every turn from would-be wives, despite his fortune, grows frustrated, and hatches a plan to steal an orphan, and raise her to be the Perfect Wife. Based on real events, this work of historical fiction opens in the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital, with Day on the hunt.

CHARACTERS

- Thomas Day A tall, dark-haired, pock-marked man of 21, disheveled, with stringy, matted long hair, dirty fingernails and drab, misshapen and fraying, but expensive, clothes.
- Sabrina (Anne) An “orphaned” girl, 12 years old, red-haired, freckled, dressed in a rough-hewn smock and no shoes.

DUAL ROLES (MAN)

- Richard Etheridge A wealthy Irish inventor of useless mechanicals and Day’s foppish friend, a few years his elder, powdered and be-wigged, spritely as a grasshopper, he dresses in the *au courante* dandy Georgian men’s style — trussed in a corset, with fat, padded calves and a stuffed chest.
- Ferry Master Middle-aged, muscular, he wears a threadbare, high-cut sailor’s uniform, heavy black fisherman’s shoes and a wide, flat black hat over a dusty white bonnet.
- Humphreys A portly milliner with white whiskers and upturned mustache, long in tooth, he wears a colorful, fat Turkish Kaftan and mismatched turban with a flamboyant ostrich plume. (Think mutton dressed as lamb.)
- Anna Seward A highbrow woman in her late twenties, with multiple suitors, she is the daughter of the Reverend Seward, the adoptive older sister of Honora and a long-ago love interest to Mister Etheridge. She fancies lofty wigs and voluminous dresses piled over wide-hooped petticoats, skillfully dominating the intellectual life — while greasing the rumor mill — in Lichfield, outside London.

DUAL ROLES (WOMAN)

- Samuel Magee Secretary to the Governor at the Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital, in his early 30's, he wears a tattered version of an earlier Regency style and speaks in the local, unrefined, Shropshire cadence.
- Thomas Coram Captain, philanthropist and master mariner, sent to sea at age 11, he created the London's Foundling Hospital in Lamb's Conduit Fields — said to be the world's first incorporated charity. Portly and ancient, he wears the too-tight, ghostly version of the Royal Navy uniform of the War of Spanish Succession (1701-14.)
- John Bicknell An unmarried English barrister and writer, co-author with Thomas Day of the 1773 abolitionist poem *The Dying Negro*, Bicknell spends his working days prosecuting bankruptcies and sending his neighboring debtors to prison. Slim and reptilian, he dresses tidily, wears small glasses and speaks with a light lisp.
- Cabin Boy A knobby, underfed teen, he wears trousers torn at the knee and a too-small sweater that reveals his midriff, with a grimy, grayed and bloodied French *Justacorps* jacket — presumably pulled off a dead infantryman — and a small woolen cap clapped on at an angle.
- Various Parisians A tailor, haberdasher, baker, coffeehouse proprietor and wigmaker, along a fashionable street in Paris.
- Reverend Seward In his fifties, the patrimonial Canon Residentiary of Lichfield, a member of the Lunar Society and the community's leading 'Freethinker', he's father to Anna Seward, adopted father to Honora and friend to Mr. Day.

DUAL ROLES (GIRL)

- Lucretia (Dorcas) A girl of 11, blonde and blue-eyed, she wears a loose shift, a shawl covering her, first seen barefoot.
- Honora Sneyd A pretty but fragile child of 14, with dark hair, adopted by the wealthy Seward family when her own mother died, and her widowed father had been unable to cope.

Staging notes:

Throughout, visual and auditory cues offer the lightest intervention possible, to set the mood and define the shifting place.

Though the piece takes place more than 300 years ago, the set should be open and contemporary, with furniture and properties serving as way-finding tools, without striving for 18th-century realism.

Likewise, costumes (including wigs and headpieces), for all but the two main characters (THOMAS DAY and SABRINA) can take on a satirical, caricature flair — in color, texture and cut. The writer has drawn inspiration from the 18th-century artists engaged in winking portraiture, pictorial satire and political cartoons, and this could be reflected in the costumes, though again, it's less important that they be historically perfected. The designer can amplify character flaws through the clothes.

(One sticky wicket is whether a character dresses in the fashion of the time, or more shabbily, in the era that preceded it, and this has been noted throughout the script.)

The production will want to explore classical composers of the era — Handel's 'Water Music', Bach's 'Air on a G String', Mozart's 'Divertimento', for example — to find the musical underpinnings for the work. Use these as markers as you desire.

Casting across color lines is absolutely encouraged. The writer has no attachment to roles being played by people of one particular race, and would ask that creative teams consider, and perhaps relinquish, their assumptions to the contrary.

ENGLAND

1769

ACT I
Scene 1 – Shrewsbury Foundling Hospital Courtyard

ANNE

There's a moment each day — when the sun is just right — when we're allowed outside — I can stand in it — Like this. Try it —

DORCAS

(She stops playing hopscotch.) I don't fit in that spot of sunlight — Give it here.

ANNE

You would actually argue over the sun?

DORCAS

(Resumes her game.) Can you remember her?

ANNE

Who?

DORCAS

Your mother?

ANNE

My mother, or the next one? Can you?

DORCAS

Just a faint smell of milk —

ANNE

We still get milk —

DORCAS

Only on Sundays.

ANNE

A day set for prayer —

DORCAS

Milk day!

ANNE

The sun's fading — Here, put your face right here. See?

DORCAS

Oh — That's lovely!

Scene 2

In a dark, cold room, THOMAS and RICHARD sip tea at a simple desk, top heavy with papers and storage bins, opposite SAMUEL. A small upstage window looks down on the hospital courtyard and the distant River Severn.

THOMAS

My colleague shall see that the girl learns by doing.

RICHARD

It's a technique we've perfected with my own son, Dick.

THOMAS

The eternal question — How can one socialize a child —

RICHARD

Introduce him to the strata and stratagem of the world —

THOMAS

While still preserving some semblance of his inherent goodness?

RICHARD

His — Difficult with a boy —

THOMAS

And for a girl —

RICHARD

Impossible!

THOMAS

Virtue, you see, is most often associated with those that are well-bred —

RICHARD

Educated, wealthy gentlemen, such as ourselves —

THOMAS

And yet, as is the contradiction, we often find generosity and rectitude amongst the impoverished, the lowest social order —

RICHARD

One finds princely valor amongst charitable souls such as yourself, Mr. Magee.

THOMAS

And he's clearly most intelligent — Just look at this place! Why, I've not seen such thrumming bureaucracy outside of the East India Company!

RICHARD

It is a curiosity that one can purchase whole colonies with a stiffly-worded memo.

THOMAS

Are you the hospital's sole processor of necessary paperwork?

SAMUEL

I is, Sir. Gots me quill at the ready.

RICHARD

Then seat yourself among the barons of banking —

THOMAS

The royals of rail!

RICHARD

We are most impressed, Mr. Magee —

THOMAS

Most impressed!

RICHARD

With the learned manner in which you wield that flight feather —

THOMAS

All the order-processing, accounting, document filing —

RICHARD

It's a shame you weren't there to negotiate the Treaty of Paris —

THOMAS

Let's rename Canada — in his honor!

RICHARD

Sir, you shall be the King of Beavers! The Emperor of Codfish!

SAMUEL

I is at office from nine in the morning (two hours dinner except) to 11 at night —

THOMAS

All in service to these pocket-sized Philistines —

SAMUEL

Used to have a holiday allowance of two pounds a year, but that was cut — And the annual turtle feast with it.

RICHARD

Not the turtle feast!

SAMUEL

Now the Committee's formally abolish'd all holy days whatsoever —

RICHARD

And yet despite these injustices —

THOMAS

By some miracle of breeding and temperament —

RICHARD

Our hero's neck is not yet subdued to the yoke!

THOMAS

Bow down before the Emperor of otters and weasels!

SAMUEL

See, this ledger? It's what makes us to sign in and out — every quarter hour!

THOMAS

You serve as a purpose-driven exemplar!

RICHARD

Our cherished Magee the dutiful engine, pulling the gin on a spindle round and round —

SAMUEL

So, you's just looking for a maid?

RICHARD

Right to business! — Our choppy sovereign has places to be.

THOMAS

Correct, Sir, for my colleague's home. A girl of 11. No more than 12.

SAMUEL

But they've got plenty of girls at the foundling home in London.

THOMAS

Mister Etheridge seeks to alleviate the confounding demands on the countryside —

RICHARD

Your plantation flaps with an abundance of children!

THOMAS

And we have traveled here these three long days —

RICHARD

A muddy business! Do you recall a road of any reasonable intention?

THOMAS

Why — I remember no comfortable conveyance past the village of Wrexham.

RICHARD

But admittedly, the Shropshire hills area is one of outstanding natural beauty—

THOMAS

Yes, quite right. This region is geologically unique —

SAMUEL

Usually it's head a housekeeping comes to collect new help?

RICHARD

My *favorite* geographical local landmark is, of course, the inimitable Wenlock Edge.

THOMAS

You always did have a soft spot for limestone escarpments.

SAMUEL

Well, I's under direct orders from the governor.

He takes a letter from his desk, reading it aloud carefully.

SAMUEL (CON'T)

“Sir, I remind you of the Care which should be taken in having proper Characters of the Persons to whom Children are placed out.”

THOMAS

Surely they shall take immense pride in your placing this creature in the home of a married gentleman —

SAMUEL

Our girls what make easy pickings for the ill-reputable —

RICHARD

I see in you the stirrings of a father —

He takes out a coin purse and places it in front of the Samuel.

RICHARD (CON'T)

A fraternity —

The Samuel feels the weight of the coins and pockets it.

RICHARD (CON'T)

And one assailed with golden grease!

SAMUEL

It is refreshing, I must say, to see fine gentlemen such as yourselves taking an interest in the servant classes.

RICHARD

We honor a woman's duties in all ages, Sir.

SAMUEL

Bit more tea?

THOMAS slurps his tea loudly.

Scene 3 — Split focus, the men talking and the girls scrubbing the floor

ANNE

I saw a cat yesterday —

DORCAS

You did?

ANNE

Tried to climb through the gate

DORCAS

What did you do?

ANNE

I shoo'd it away —

RICHARD

I say, a drop more chatter broth would cut the chill, thank you.

THOMAS

Why — my friend and colleague has invented a turnip slicer!

SAMUEL

Do city folk need help with their turnips?

RICHARD

Before my mechanized wonder, turnips just lay about!

THOMAS

Yes, our municipality's root vegetables had been quite listless —

RICHARD

Lackadaisical rutabagas, languid parsnips —

THOMAS

'Tis mere fact that sous chefs adore you!

SAMUEL

And why's we talking about yams and such?

RICHARD

Do try to keep up, Mister Magee!

THOMAS

As representatives of the Lunar Society of Birmingham —

RICHARD

Prominent figures —

THOMAS

Are well-equipped to impart wisdom to any young charge —

DORCAS

I coulda kept the cat in our room —

ANNE

And feed it what?

DORCAS

I'd save it scraps —

ANNE

They check our pockets —

DORCAS

Did you have a cat before?

ANNE

I think I did?

DORCAS

I had one — A big fat orange one.

ANNE

Best not to think —

DORCAS

He was a birder! Though I don't know how — So big and fat yet a murderer! He'd leap up and (*She pretends to kill a bird*)

SAMUEL

So, you means to educate her?

THOMAS

Yes, in Navigation and Chronology, Geography and Greek — All the favored topics, that you, my dear fellow, likely wouldn't understand.

SAMUEL

But she's a maid. Stairs go up — Stairs go down. Stairs go up — Stairs go down.

RICHARD

Dear Mister Magee, our most vexatious chum —

THOMAS

We shall once more attempt to penetrate —

RICHARD

We are influenced by prominent industrialists —

THOMAS

By natural philosophers —

SAMUEL

I just don't see what's the use of it —

THOMAS

The parliamentary assemblage recognizes the value of your work, Sir.

SAMUEL

Well, I wish they didn't. Easy to write a Law in London — Now I's have to take in every babe what shows up here. Used to be we could discard the mangled, the woeful, those without hope. Now's we's forced to take 'em all in! Objects so miserable — even their wet nurses refuses 'em!!

THOMAS

The Great Reception!

RICHARD

Children — carding, spinning, sewing, weaving!

THOMAS

Sir, you should think yourself a Statesman!

RICHARD

We had heard of — but had not yet witnessed — such unrivaled machinations!

SAMUEL

I haven't had meself a good night's sleep since 1760!

RICHARD

Why, your manufactory veritably hums with bucolic bliss!

SAMUEL

My clever girls gets apprenticed —

THOMAS

With what rigor do the children approach their industry?

SAMUEL

Nine — Ten hour days. But the children don't work more than me!

ANNE

(Drawing letters on the floor with water.) Try it again —

DORCAS

That's a C.

ANNE

Good! Yes — And where is there a C?

DORCAS

In my name —

ANNE

Spell it —

DORCAS

D-O-R-K-

ANNE

No! (*She hits her with her scrub brush*) Try it again.

DORCAS

Ow!

RICHARD

Such benevolence!

THOMAS

The child who only reads does not think — Thus is our downfall.

RICHARD

One only hopes the wretched express their gratitude for your loving care —

SAMUEL

We's produce upright citizens — Constant employment —

THOMAS

Tabula rasa — blank slate — white paper?

SAMUEL

They've no use for 'em.

RICHARD

Having ideas would only lead to melancholy!

ANNE

I drew a picture — Look.

DORCAS

Where?

ANNE

On the floor —

DORCAS

What is it?

ANNE

That's the valley — There, the river, see?

DORCAS

I don't see anything —

ANNE

It's the view of town —

DORCAS

Oh — I see it now. Is that here? Is that me?

SAMUEL

For domestic work, you'll be wanting a bona fide cinder-garbler — not some waif —

RICHARD

What we're looking for is a fairness of cheek — An innocence.

SAMUEL

These girls have no one's face but they's own —

THOMAS

A girl who's not yet built up the flats and sharps of her arsenal.

SAMUEL

Porridge every day — and meat on Sunday.

THOMAS

You are a Saint, Sir.

SAMUEL

So, will you's be wanting the customary line-up?

RICHARD

We couldn't help notice a girl in the work room —

THOMAS

With arms white as milk — soft and rounded, like a painting —

RICHARD

Auburn haired? About 12?

SAMUEL

That's our Anne. Brought here as a gut-foundered babe.

He takes out a huge leather ledger book and opens it, searching.

SAMUEL (CON'T)

I found her me-self, tucked in a bundle with not so much as a token — No button, nutshell or scrap a paper. A meager little skirleton —

THOMAS
This wretch shall be revenant!

RICHARD
Reborn to new stability!

DORCAS
This water's cold —

ANNE
Nearly done —

DORCAS
Tomorrow's just the same, though —

ANNE
Could be worse — You —

DORCAS
“Could be starving!” – That's what Mister Magee says.

ANNE
Can you remember starving?

DORCAS
I think I had a brother?

SAMUEL
She's always in a goodly disposition —

RICHARD
Hard worker?

THOMAS
No complaints?

SAMUEL
Here it 'tis. “Female child, numbered 4579.”

RICHARD
A promisingly expedient classification system — Wherein these pitiable flora are protected within the walls of your philanthropic hothouse!

SAMUEL

The devil himself may dance in her pocket, but Anne knows her way 'round a bit of lye cake, every morning, polishing the floors like this is a home befits a King. Knows the basics of cooking, too, and she helps with the little ones. Can sew and mend —

THOMAS

And she's had no toys which appeal to the eyes? No dressing up-mirrors, no jewelry?

SAMUEL

These girls get's a dog's portion.

THOMAS

To confirm, she's had no exposure to personal adornment?

SAMUEL

She could be raised up as a lady's maid with a bit a training.

THOMAS

We have here evidence towards measurable subservience!

SAMUEL

I trains them —

THOMAS

My colleague shall be her most patient tutor.

SAMUEL

— to make themselves useful —

THOMAS

And that's your precious gift, Sir.

RICHARD

Little girls always dislike learning to read and write anyway!

ANNE

Finish the floor and I'll let you hear a limerick —

DORCAS

Really? (*Scrubs faster.*)

ANNE

Finish my part and I'll give you two.

SAMUEL

Well, I do me level best to raise ‘em up but we can’t place ‘em all. And the one’s we can’t, well, the city streets are lined wif my girls what become — *academicians*.

RICHARD

How you do exceed yourself with such break-teeth words!

SAMUEL

Laced mutton — that’s the real women’s work, ain’t it —

THOMAS

Men will always be what is pleasing to women.

SAMUEL

I’ll fetch the girl for you’s — and then to sign the papers. (*He approaches ANNE.*)

RICHARD

Vile blashy weather — Calls for a dram.

He offers a flask to Thomas, who takes a swig.

RICHARD (CON’T)

And I must tell you of my latest gadgetry! It’s a folding canopy — Mounted on a pole!

THOMAS

You’re insane.

RICHARD

It is designed to protect a person against rain — or sunlight!

THOMAS

And why would one require protection against such natural phenomena?

RICHARD

I’m not sure yet.

THOMAS

Like a cat — its paw in the mouse’s hole, my dear Etheridge, you never tire. But I fear the lead with which you spackle your face each morning is entreating upon your brain.

RICHARD

Steady on, my peevish friend, for this beau-nasty business is easier than I’d imagined!

THOMAS

These are simple people — country-put.

RICHARD

I care not to seek the House of Commons in this bloody awful place —

He goes to the upstage wall, and urinates.

SAMUEL

Up, girl —

ANNE

Sir?

DORCAS

Me, too, Mr. Magee?

SAMUEL

Not you — Just Anne. Come now —

ANNE

Where, Sir?

SAMUEL

A wealthy gentleman —

DORCAS

No!

SAMUEL

Let go of me! (*Pushes her to the ground.*) Know your place!

ANNE

Watch for the cat —

DORCAS

I can't —

ANNE

And stand in the sun at midday —

RICHARD (CON'T)

(*Looking back over his shoulder*) Why, you're grinning like a basket of chips! Pray, tell me, Head Master, will the course of study begin expediently?

THOMAS

Once we find a girl young enough to comply, but not so old that I must wait a dog's ear to wed? Why then, Sir, yes —

RICHARD

In the model of Pygmalion himself! And though we may both go up a ladder for it —
(*Scratching.*) This place has fleas.

THOMAS

She shall be my good work.

RICHARD

Such boiled dedication I've not seen in any gospel-shop!

THOMAS

Virtue is a state of war with oneself.

RICHARD

When I am tinkering —

THOMAS

Why *should* we be subjected to the whims of the softer sex?

RICHARD

A toast!

RICHARD dumps THOMAS's remaining tea on the ground and refills his teacup from the flask.

RICHARD (CON'T)

To the Holy Trinity: King George, Prime Minister North and our inimitable intimate, Mister Magee! — Never has there been a sadder, soggier trio of pea-brained windsocks in the whole history of the British Isles!

They both drink heartily. DORCAS enters the office, scrubbing the floor unnoticed as SAMUEL approaches ANNE with a wash basin.

SAMUEL

Wash your face — Here, with this — Good.

ANNE

Like this, Sir?

SAMUEL

Behind your ears —

ANNE

This water's boiling — And smells of Sulphur!

SAMUEL

How would you know what Sulphur is?

ANNE

Am I done now?

SAMUEL

Wash those parts there — I'll turn around.

ANNE

Sir?

SAMUEL

Those parts — Corners — crannies — Whatnot —

ANNE

(Makes the sound of a cloth in the water and wringing it out.) All clean —

SAMUEL

Your hands are filthy — Here, cut your nails —

ANNE

With what, Sir?

SAMUEL

How have you always done it?

ANNE

Sir, with my teeth —

SAMUEL

Good enough. Trim them down a bit —

ANNE

(Biting her nails.) This gentleman —

SAMUEL

Put these shoes on —

ANNE

They're too big —

SAMUEL

We will present you with shoes on, child! Put them on!

ANNE

Yes, Sir.

SAMUEL

Let me comb your hair one last —

ANNE

I'll do it —

SAMUEL

It's my comb — You can't touch it.

ANNE

Ow — You're pulling —

SAMUEL

I've a ribbon for you. Pretty, isn't — Do you like it?

ANNE

I can put it in —

SAMUEL

I'll pull your hair back — See your pretty face —

SAMUEL takes ANNE slowly by the wrist. He cups her cheek and leans in towards her. She resists, breathes in and out and follows him offstage, DORCAS watching.

As THOMAS and RICHARD move about, they narrowly miss DORCAS scrubbing.

THOMAS

Women, for their part, are always complaining that we raise them only to be vain —

RICHARD

That we keep them amused with trivialities —

THOMAS

So that we may more easily remain their masters! What stupidity!

RICHARD

Will you look at this bite on my ankle? Do you think it's from a spider?

THOMAS

Is anyone forcing their frig-pig daughters to waste their time on foolish games? Are they forced against their will to spend half their lives on their appearance?

RICHARD

So, is it your plan this vector rides back *in* the coach — or with the driver? Because one assumes she carries lice.

THOMAS

If the art they learn attracts and flatters us — Why then we merely encourage them to display at their leisure the weapons with which they subjugate!

RICHARD

Perhaps she should ride on the baggage boot?

THOMAS

My pupil shall take in only the knowledge that I bequeath her —

RICHARD

So, she should ride with the luggage, then? Good.

THOMAS

No. She rides with us, our — equal, Sir.

RICHARD

Perhaps you should have tried this formidable technique with my sister!

THOMAS

Your sister is a pedigreed monster.

RICHARD

She was to be yours — A gentle doe, ready to yield herself to your knife.

THOMAS

I have my features.

RICHARD

My poor sister practically begged father for mercy from your constant disquisitions!

THOMAS

Is it my fault she's too dull to comprehend?

RICHARD

Observing your attempts to woo is like watching a garden rake make love!

THOMAS

I would that you bite your tongue, Sir!

RICHARD

My sister is a plump currant, well-regarded as the finest fruit of her generation. And you, with all your fortune — couldn't pluck her!

THOMAS

I plied her assiduously — with literature *and* mathematics!

RICHARD

Nothing is natural to a woman about a stack of books!

THOMAS

On metaphysics!

RICHARD

It's as if, when parting, you had left your fiancée with a *potato*.

THOMAS

Shift your Bob, Sir! I'll speak no more of that bitch!

RICHARD

(Reaching for his dagger) Avast! You're a heartless Resurrection Man — And every woman a cadaver — readied for dissection!

THOMAS

Women have just have been brought up poorly.

RICHARD

And will this perfect woman drink from streams — as you are want to do?

THOMAS

As long as she bends to my will at every moment.

RICHARD

Well I frequent my share of apple dumpling shops and I can tell you — empirically and without equivocation — that this “perfect woman” you seek simply does not exist!

THOMAS

Every woman on earth is both enthralling and repelling —

RICHARD

There, we agree!

THOMAS

Woman is effluvia, miscarried by our creator!

RICHARD

When you meet this woman, I wouldn't lead with that.

THOMAS

My gift to mankind shall be to make a new woman — in my own image.

RICHARD

If only she could be slightly more hygienic?

THOMAS

My voyage of discovery shall be a primer for future men!

RICHARD

But you dismiss love.

THOMAS

My rational mind does not find itself monopolized by such trivia.

RICHARD

Would that your rational mind was capable of occasionally bathing, Sir. Tell me, have you even been with a woman? Have you ever wielded that bit of red — that bird-spit of yours — in the direction of the Narrow Seas?

THOMAS

This specimen knows only the most primitive emotions —

RICHARD

A scraped tablet — Ready to be inked up.

THOMAS

She will love me — for love is merely an idea of preference.

RICHARD

But she will never be more than a mixture of drinks from unfinished bottles —

THOMAS

She depends on me — to expose her to the world with the utmost care, so that I might fulfill my needs, without subjecting her to corruption.

RICHARD

You are a conjurer!

THOMAS

Like you, with your magnets and pulleys, delighting a gelatinous crowd of drunken imbeciles with “magic” and mechanicals —

RICHARD

But marriage also makes demands on the laws of frequency — and of similarity.

THOMAS

I do know the law of contrast — of pleasure and of pain.

RICHARD

My virginal familiar, what you do not understand, is that the act of making tiny mewling faces is far more enjoyable than any offspring.

THOMAS

I am aware that women — and their discharge — are heavy baggage.

RICHARD

Woman is a fickle creature and children thieves of time and resource!

THOMAS

That's how it has been. But I —

RICHARD

Yes, dear Sir?

THOMAS

I shall build the Perfect Wife.

RICHARD

A noble procedure — With no hope of success!

THOMAS

She shall know the look, the feel, the smell, the taste — of what it means to serve —

RICHARD

(Scratching) Well, I hope your hermitage has room for a few bosom friends —

THOMAS jumps up on his chair.

THOMAS

The more women want to resemble men, the less women will govern them! And then men will truly be the masters!

RICHARD

You've been fed with a fire shovel, Sir! Perhaps to make a wager?

He jumps up, too, taking out his coin purse.

RICHARD (CON'T)

I'll bet you a bender you can't transform this worthless servant into a noble wife!

THOMAS

(Putting a hand to his heart.) Binding myself under no less a penalty than that of having my body severed in two, my bowels taken from thence and burned to ashes, the ashes scattered to the four winds of heaven, so that no more trace or remembrance may be had of so vile and perjured a wretch as I, should I ever knowingly or willingly violate this my solemn obligation as a member of the Lunar Society Supper Club.

Richard laughs and Thomas is incredulous in his seriousness.

THOMAS (CON'T)

So help me God, and keep me steadfast in the due performance of the same!

RICHARD

Now hush — you beef head! Bring your ass to anchor —

They both quickly sit down again, reclining as if in repose.

SABRINA enters, followed by SAMUEL.

ANNE/SABRINA

Good Day, Sirs.

THOMAS

Dear child, just as you were saved from the sins of illegitimate birth —

DORCAS

Hi, Anne!

SAMUEL

Shut up! *(He kicks her.)*

RICHARD

Fortune smiles on your misery today!

THOMAS

You shall be obliged to serve as a maid in my colleague's Berkshire home —

RICHARD

Have you seen the Berkshires?

SAMUEL

She aint' been to the village since she were —

THOMAS

Provided for in comfort — these next nine years of your life.

ANNE/SABRINA

Nine years?

RICHARD

(Speaking loudly) Can it understand you?

THOMAS

You shall not be subsumed to the baleful existence of the weaver, the thatcher, the shoemaker, the tailor — No, you shall learn. Your benefactor shall see to it.

RICHARD

Look, how she wears her number ‘round her neck! 4579! *(Yelling)* So pretty, my dear!

SAMUEL

Sign here, please, Sir.

RICHARD

(Reading aloud) “And so, it here pledges Anne Kingston to faithfully serve in all lawful Business according to her Power, Wit and Ability; and honestly, orderly and obediently in all Things demean and behave herself towards her said Master.”

Richard dips a quill pen and signs the paper.

THOMAS

My dear girl —

RICHARD

Your rosy cheek gives us reason to know God.

DORCAS

Where is you taking her?

THOMAS

And to the matter of the customary payment —

SAMUEL

Four pounds, Sirs.

Richard drops four heavy coins in a metal lock box on the desk.

THOMAS

Now to your name —

RICHARD

It's name is "Anne" — So charming!

DORCAS

My name is Dorcas — D — O — R

Samuel raises his hand to strike —

THOMAS

Of uncertain etymology, the name Sabrina is borne in Celtic mythology by an illegitimate daughter of the Welsh king Lochrine. The child was ordered drowned by the king's wife, Gwendolen, thus giving her name to the river in which the foul deed took place — A river that runs just here. Can you see it?

ANNE/SABRINA

I see it from the courtyard every day at midday, Sir.

SAMUEL

You can sees it from the workhouse!

RICHARD

A marvel of design —

THOMAS

Latin writings of the first century list the river's name as Sabrina.

ANNE/SABRINA

Sabrina —

THOMAS

And so, you shall be renamed —

RICHARD

4579!

THOMAS

You'll be renamed for that river so the blood flowing through you remembers —

DORCAS

I have a number, too! Read mine!

ANNE/SABRINA

Be quiet — Shh!

SAMUEL

You're a lucky one — A new name! See? Good care —

THOMAS

In your name — an eddy of unrestrained charity.

SABRINA

Aye, Sir.

RICHARD

Fear not, child. We've brought you a small gift.

THOMAS pulls a porcelain doll from his case.

THOMAS

See how the girl instinctively reaches for it?

RICHARD

And what necessary skills have you, girl?

SABRINA

I knows washing, cooking, stoking fires. Patterning, sewing, tailoring, spinning, weaving. I can helps in the kitchen. We ain't got silver to polish, but I's can learn that, too.

RICHARD

Notice its cadence — enough to make dog laugh!

THOMAS

My dear girl, let us begin with language: "I am familiar with the domestic arts."

SABRINA

I ams familiars —

RICHARD

(Laughing) I shall afford you opportunity —

THOMAS

Yes, Sabrina. This is your liberating benefactor, Mr. Etheridge. And I his counsel, Mr. Day. He shall be your lord and master.

SAMUEL

Now a curtsy, girl. You, too, Dorcas!

DORCAS

Can I say goo'bye to her?

RICHARD

Fortune shines on you, Sabrina —

THOMAS

You're to be — elevated.

SABRINA

Sir.

Scene Four — A small apartment in London and a Splendid Manor Home

As the onstage characters transform the space from a simply-appointed office to a split stage — Half Georgian manor house, half tiny garret — FOUNDER CORAM enters, reading aloud a letter —

FOUNDER CORAM

Sabrina, I am your blessed godfather, Founder Coram — Be still, child. You are placed out an Apprentice by the Governors of the Foundling Hospital — Do you remember?

SABRINA reads a letter aloud —

SABRINA

You were taken into it very young, quite helpless, forsaken and deserted —

FOUNDER CORAM

Out of Charity, you have been fed, clothed —

SABRINA AND FOUNDER CORAM

And instructed —

FOUNDER CORAM

Which many have wanted.

SABRINA

Be not ashamed, but own it —

FOUNDER CORAM

And say that it was through Good Providence that you were taken —

SABRINA

I can write in the dust here — Yes, right here, Dorcas — What? You saw the cat? The orange one? You did? (*She writes on a table with her finger*) There was a Young Lady whose bonnet — Came untied when the birds sat — Come on, Dorcas! What rhymes? Think, stupid! Upon it! But she said: 'I don't care! — All the birds in the air — Are welcome to sit on my —

THOMAS noisily unlocks the door and enters.

SABRINA

GoodDay, Sir! So glad it's you!

THOMAS

Who else is it?

SABRINA

The wind, Sir!

THOMAS

The wind? Your smile's not necessary, Sabrina, but appreciated. Now the embrace

FOUNDER CORAM

In whatever Service you perform, you are to endeavor —

SABRINA

Not only to please the Eye of Men — but do all with that Care —

THOMAS

As to please the Eye of God.

SABRINA

Your coat, Sir? Your hat?

FATHER CORAM

The Motive in all you do, ought to be, to comply with the Will of God.

*THOMAS lights a candle and places a tied bundle in front of
SABRINA, which she opens carefully. It contains a small bit of
bread and a lump of cheese. She waits to eat.*

SABRINA

May I now, Sir?

THOMAS

(Nodding.) My mother had me wait far longer — Made a man of me!

FOUNDER CORAM

The Comfort of all your labors is to be —

THOMAS

Easy! Slower now — You'll choke!

FATHER CORAM

The most difficult Labors are due to God —

THOMAS

Now your lessons. Drink this water — Speak!

SABRINA

God will be the Recompense of whatever is done faithfully —

THOMAS

Who has no Respect of Persons — but will reward the Servant and his Master —

SABRINA

I'm still hungry, Sir.

THOMAS

(Poking her middle.) You grow fat!

SABRINA

I don't, Sir!

THOMAS

According to his Works! More cheese?

SABRINA

Yes, please — At the hospital we had porridge to start the day, but here —

THOMAS

“Had” — We had.

SABRINA

We had.

THOMAS

And you can eat once per day — Good enough for Sparta!

FOUNDER CORAM

The Work you undertake is your Duty — and ought to be done —

THOMAS

Sabrina —

SABRINA

For Duty sake —

THOMAS
And because?

SABRINA
God always sees you.

FATHER CORAM
This is the Fidelity belonging to Servants — as the Servants of Christ —

SABRINA
Does God like cheese? He must!

THOMAS
Impudent —

SABRINA
Dorcas says that God loves pudding — Does God love pudding?

FATHER CORAM
If you follow his Direction you may be sure —

THOMAS
Pudding? Such riches aren't for you. I pay your wages!

FATHER CORAM
Besides the Yearly Wages from your Master —

SABRINA
Me yearly wages? You hear that, Dorcas?

THOMAS
“My” — Your — She's not here! Stop that —

FATHER CORAM
You will have God's to reward.

THOMAS
Am I your good master, then?

SABRINA
Aye, you and God.

THOMAS
I bring you cheese —

SABRINA

I does like cheddar.

THOMAS

Do, You *do*. One does. Do you like me, though, girl?

SABRINA

Can I have a cat? A big orange one? I want to name him Dorcas.

FATHER CORAM

Do your Work carelessly, or leave it undone and instead of a Reward —

THOMAS

(Seeing the limerick in the dust.) What's this?

SABRINA

Just writing, Sir —

THOMAS

Dust?

SABRINA

Just jokes —

THOMAS

My mother's husband used to say I'd find —

FATHER CORAM

God the Punisher —

THOMAS

(Taking off his belt.) — Of my neglect.*FOUNDER CORAM exits.**(Wiping.)* It's clean! It's clean now — See?

THOMAS

And have you swept and mopped today?

SABRINA

With relish —

THOMAS

Done the swilling and the grates?

SABRINA
I'll be needing more water — Can I's get it?

THOMAS
Can you?

SABRINA
Thank you, Sir?

THOMAS
Outside? To think —

Sabrina nervously hands THOMAS a vest she's repaired.

SABRINA
I used me finest stitches — See, what's blend in?

THOMAS
“I have used the finest stitches. Please note how they are undetectable.”

SABRINA
Finest stitches — Undetectable!

THOMAS
We're undetectable —

SABRINA
Do I displease?

THOMAS
Sweet girl, you delight in the menial! — knowing not the words form complaint!

SABRINA
I've been practicing me sums — On the window —

THOMAS
Like I told you — With no discernable concern for my accounts.

SABRINA
(*Standing on a chair.*) I scratch the numbers in the glass — Like this.

THOMAS
A fancy lady with her *window*.

SABRINA

You's window —

THOMAS

Tell me — Do you think it economically enjoyable to keep you?

SABRINA

I could's't take in piecework, if you'd arrange it?

THOMAS

I train you to be welcomed to society —

SABRINA

But the washing?

THOMAS

Now, shall we to your lessons?

SABRINA

Oh, yes Sir, please.

THOMAS

(He comes up close behind her.) See there, how the waning moon shines brightly?

SABRINA

I'll lose me balance!

THOMAS

Thou shalt observe the setting of the sun and the rising of the moon, in practical demonstration, and note it.

SABRINA

I can't, Sir.

THOMAS

And why not?

SABRINA

It's dark when you're not here — I needs a candle.

THOMAS

You need a — Why?

SABRINA

To chart the moon, Sir —

THOMAS

You'd take everything — My cheese, my candles — Just chart the moon and when it's full, write it here.

He hands her a quill, ink bottle and paper from his satchel.

SABRINA

Can I try now? (*Hopping down.*) I've never — Mister Magee 'ad one of these —

THOMAS

Imbecile! You hold it incorrectly!

SABRINA

Is this the way?

THOMAS

Yes, now dip — No, not so much, tap, good, now write.

SABRINA

Sir, I don't know —

THOMAS

Then draw the moon, for pity's sake!

SABRINA inhales and carefully traces what she sees on the page.

SABRINA

If I had a candle I could write stories — Would you like that?

THOMAS

The first evidence of recognition that astronomical phenomena are periodic and of the application of mathematics to their prediction is Babylonian —

SABRINA

Or letters — I could write to Father Coram, tell him I'm well —

THOMAS

Of course, Astronomy in the Indian subcontinent was used to create calendars.

SABRINA

Or I could write to Sir Richard?

THOMAS

The precise orientation of the Egyptian pyramids — Sir Richard?

SABRINA

How long should I watch then, Sir?

THOMAS

Yes — You could write to Sir Richard with an update —

SABRINA

What's the moon doing, Sir? Just hanging there?

THOMAS

Mister Richard's a freethinker —

SABRINA

Yes, Sir. I like him, Sir. Can I have a candle?

THOMAS

Give her cheese and she develops reasons for the motions of the Cosmos.

SABRINA

The Cosmos, Sir? Can I have a cat — An orange one?

THOMAS pulls SABRINA's long hair away from her face.

THOMAS

Plato describes the universe as a spherical body divided into circles — the whole mish-mash governed according to harmonic intervals by a world soul.

SABRINA

If I had a candle I could write poetry — Would that please you?

THOMAS

Quick — Finish your drawing before it's gone!

SABRINA

Yes, Sir.

The focus shifts to a meeting of the Lunar Society, in the country home of John BICKNELL. BICKNELL and RICHARD stand grouped together. Alcohol flows.

BICKNELL

Although the motions of celestial bodies are qualitatively explained in physical terms by Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, it's my man Kepler attempts to derive mathematical predictions of celestial motions from assumed physical causes.

THOMAS steps into the Lunar Society scene, as SABRINA continues drawing the moon.

THOMAS

But he shall not have moored his physical insights without the unprecedentedly accurate naked-eye observations made by Tycho Brahe!

RICHARD

Do you suppose Sir Isaac Newtown came up with his law of universal gravitation in the whorehouse?

THOMAS

Churlish knave!

BICKNELL

Is it all draggle-tails with you?

SABRINA

No, Dorcas — You can't have pudding! What?

RICHARD

Why, perhaps it was not Sir Isaac Newton — but a brilliant Drury Lane abbess — who first made the observation that the same force that attracts objects to the surface of the Earth holds the moon, and man, in orbit.

BICKNELL

And so, our Mr. Day mystifies in his inability to attract even a mosquito — breaking the very tenets of the *Philosopheia Naturalis*!

RICHARD

Patience, master Bicknell! Our squirmy Mister Day may yet land bung upwards!

BICKNELL

Double-Cape Horned by a — Little girl!

SABRINA

(*Picking up the doll that RICHARD gave her.*) Pease porridge hot — Pease porridge cold —

THOMAS

Would that you two cease your chiding? I undertake my duties *ab initio* — starting directly at the level of established science and making no assumptions such as empirical model and parameter fitting.

SABRINA

Pease porridge in the pot nine days old —

BICKNELL

And what if your highly irregular experiment goes afoul?

THOMAS

What do you mean?

BICKNELL

As any statistician might suggest — The odds are not exactly in your favor.

THOMAS

I will succeed.

BICKNELL

And children get sick — Could the Great Doctor not benefit from a spare?

SABRINA

(Playing paddy cake with the doll.) Some like it hot — Some like it cold —

RICHARD

I know I'm relieved in my slumbers to have an heir — and a redundancy.

BICKNELL

Even if the girl does live to maturity, how can you be certain she will bow sufficiently under your training?

THOMAS

She will comply.

BICKNELL

What if — God forbid — she doesn't?

RICHARD

One might hedge his bets.

As THOMAS speaks, the small garret is transformed again into a Foundling Hospital Office — This one in London — And SABRINA and LUCRETIA move physically through the blocking of the “adoption” process, with LUCRETIA the wide-eyed Apprentice, and SABRINA playing the men's role, each wearing costumes that echo SAMUEL MAGEE's and MISTER DAY's.

SABRINA

Some like it in the pot — Nine days old.

THOMAS

I shall take no chances on my future happiness!

RICHARD

And so to a new hunt!

BICKNELL

(*To RICHARD*) The contract pins your boy, Dick, to the girl, should our man Thomas fail in his endeavors. What say you to sullying your line?

RICHARD

I place my firstborn's future opportunity in the able hands of his dear uncle Thomas! He'll not come of age only to dip the family wick in such cheap tallow.

BICKNELL

If Dick fails, why then I shall take the girl! A failsafe is most prudent, don't you think?

RICHARD

Seeing that wretch ensnared in your oily crab claws is a portrait I'd rather not dwell on —

BICKNELL

At least I am still recognizably masculine. Why — you wear more perfume than half the women of London! And these legs — And that chest. You belong on exhibition!

THOMAS

Enough, lads! Are we back in the schoolyard?

RICHARD AND BICKNELL

He started it!

SABRINA

Now a curtsy, girl. You, too, Dorcas!

THOMAS

I do accept this challenge: To educate both ingrates — and picking the winning candidate for my future wife.

SABRINA

Four pounds, Sirs.

BICKNELL

(*Looking into an upside-down liquor bottle.*) Why we've given the bottle a black eye! Shall we then to amend the contract? With great fortune, I do honor you as a representative of the courts!

RICHARD

Your wig is crooked — Let us fix it.

SABRINA

It's name is "Anne" — So charming!

BICKNELL

But I've not my barrister bands — nor my collaret! I can't possibly perform legal executive functions without my full regalia.

RICHARD

Such a baby! Here! A good doily shall make a workable substitution!

RICHARD stuffs a white cloth napkin down his friend's collar and BICKNELL uses RICHARD's back as a desk, scrawling jauntily as he speaks.

BICKNELL

"I, Sir Thomas Day, do foreswear to choose a wife from amongst a pair of equals and to make a dispatch of my forsaken to an appropriate apprenticeship" —

RICHARD

That tickles, you old caterpillar!

SABRINA

You're a lucky one — A new name! See? Good care

THOMAS

Excuse me, Sir? Apprenticeship?

BICKNELL

Well, you can't very well leave her on the street!

RICHARD

Conscience dictates that the lesser girl be cast adrift, chiseled from your life and dispatched with the means of survival.

THOMAS

Adzooks, man! You wield the cudgel of morality like a drunken finger-post!

RICHARD

And add a dowry — Make it 300, no, 400 pounds!

THOMAS

Bandits! This schoolboy fegary will be my ruin! And tell me, in this secular God Shop you hold the keys to — What is my reward for my future sacrifice?

RICHARD

We are your closest — nay, your only allies in it.

THOMAS

I'll be the talk of the town! The envy —

BICKNELL

Perhaps you've been swelling about amidships too long — lost in the belly of your deviations —

SABRINA

We've brought you a small gift —

RICHARD

I wouldn't be surprised to see his baked anatomy hanging from the gallows.

BICKNELL

We're in foreign territory!

RICHARD

I've never been an accomplice — It's quite titillating!

BICKNELL

Are you prepared, Day, to spend your last days, awaiting the executioner?

RICHARD

By a musky Ensign-bearer!

BICKNELL

Eating only dirty dog soup —

RICHARD

Shall we then to a blood swear? This is the best day ever!

SABRINA

See how it reaches instinctively?

BICKNELL

We promise muffled discretion!

SABRINA

Note its cadence —

THOMAS

Are we so regressed?

Turning to face upstage of the others, RICHARD drops his trousers and wags his penis side to side, his hands by his ears.

RICHARD

Facultatem et disciplinam! Ability — and discipline!

THOMAS

Were you dropped on your head in your youth?

RICHARD turns, brandishing a knife, he cuts his palm and squeezes blood on the contract — then resumes his role as a desk. The other men follow suit, cutting and dripping their blood.

BICKNELL

“Gracing this dispatch with the sum of 400 pounds.” Sign here, Sir!

RICHARD puts his blood-dripping hand to his nose, wiggling fingers outstretched, laughing.

BICKNELL (CON’T)

And bite our thumbs at all known moral and ethical convention!

RICHARD

You will be the toast of the town!

SABRINA

I ams familiar — You, too, Dorcas — Now a curtsy. Wash up — Put these shoes on. There. A little lady — A little lady — Just like me.

DORCAS

Can I say goo’bye to her?

SABRINA

Mister Day says we can have a cat when we get to France —

DORCAS

An orange one?

SABRINA

Yes — Probably — Put this coat on now —

DORCAS

What is France?

Scene Five — Dover, November 1769

The space is transformed into a foggy dock. The sound of the foreboding Dover harbor is heard. THOMAS stands facing the FERRY MASTER, SABRINA and LUCRETIA under his cloak. The CABIN BOY polishes his master’s boots.

THOMAS

I say, is this packet ship going to Calais?

FERRY MASTER

(Looking up from his ledger) Aye, Sir. Every Thursday.

THOMAS

How much — for myself and my two wards?

FERRY MASTER

We's under strict green-bag orders, Sir. Packet-boats ought not to carry — parcels or any other freight — what's *vulnerable* to piracy.

THOMAS

Why, you impertinent — my family owns a share of the fleet!

FERRYMASTER

Take your case to Head of Customs, Mr. Houseman — You'll find him in the local letters office on Snargate Street — or the pub.

THOMAS

The Day family has been farming the mail since 1660!

FERRY MASTER

The rules is laid down by Statute.

THOMAS

But these girls are — We — I have been advised to seek a change of climate, for their health.

THOMAS pinches both girls, who cough piteously, on cue.

FERRY MASTER

And so, it won't trouble you none to travel in safety, Sir.

THOMAS

But we must today — The cold air here, see how it aggravates their delicate nature?

FERRY MASTER

It's me master's duty to satisfy that no packet carry so large a quantity of goods — or stows 'em in such a manner — as to put the ship outta trim.

THOMAS

My good fellow — Perhaps you can be meant to see reason?

FERRY MASTER

These are notorious waters, Sir, 'specially this time of year.

THOMAS

I'm well aware of the movement in a ship's vertical, lateral and longitudinal axes! Yes, yes — You call it (*Yelling*) pitch, roll and yaw.

FERRY MASTER

Well, we's can't have a couple a girls in cargo!

THOMAS

There are methods for both passive and active motion stabilization —

FERRY MASTER

But you wouldn't want to see your girls beset by dunkirkers — would you, Sirs?

THOMAS

I shall protect the girls' innocence with my own life.

FERRY MASTER

These Corsairs cut a nasty jib. (*Looks across the channel*) They's layin' in wait, patrolling like hungry cats, just at the mouth of the river — always ready to pounce on fresh, pretty little mice!

The girls hide in the cloak.

THOMAS

You play the foreman of the jury!

FERRY MASTER

These be murky waters, Sir. Half the tea drunk in England's been smuggled in — With pretty lace stuffed in dead geese, brandy kegs in lobster pots, tobacco — twisted into ropes! Think these Jimmies wouldn't take your girls?

THOMAS

Thou paints a knock-down portrait, Sir.

FERRY MASTER

I takes pride in me deliverables.

THOMAS hands the FERRY MASTER a bag of coin.

THOMAS

You do exhaust me, Sir.

FERRY MASTER

What's this? It's not every day we transport live lumber. Come aboard, ladies — And be quick!

Scene Six — Paris

Lively and lush music plays, as the space is transformed into a series of five small shops along a fashionable street in Paris: A tailor, a wig shop, a shoe shop/haberdasher, a bakery and a coffeehouse. THOMAS ushers SABRINA and DORCAS/LUCRETIA from one to the other, espousing.

THOMAS

Edgeworth thinks it strange that I would take two young girls to this country —

In the tailor's shop, THOMAS is quickly fitted with a lacey jacket, with the tailor smoothing his shoulders and plucking loose threads.

THOMAS (CON'T)

Of course, I have as a large portion of the national prejudice in favor of the people of England — And against the French — As any man can have. But they do weave a fine camblet! What's the word for this? Oh — Camblay. Sabrina — Lucretia — The 'T' is silent in France. Are you listening?

DORCAS/LUCRETIA

My feet hurt.

THOMAS

I will buy this gold velvet jacket for Sir Richard.

SABRINA

He'll like it, Sir.

DORCAS/LUCRETIA

Yes — Mister Richard will like it!

SABRINA

You don't even know him, Dorcas!

LUCRETIA

My name's Lucretia!

THOMAS

A much better name! Thank you — *Merci* — I shall wear it out! Yes — *Oui*. Sabrina — carry these parcels — Come Lucretia. Let's go see the Seine!

SABRINA

Wait for me, Sir!

THOMAS

Mind the road, ladies! Don't think these froggy carriage drivers won't kill you!

LUCRETIA

What's that smell?

THOMAS

A most foul populace — incessant chatter!

LUCRETIA

I need to relieve myself, Sir.

THOMAS

What?

LUCRETIA

I need to pee!

SABRINA

Then hold it!

THOMAS

Why then, we shall look away. Lift your skirts! Here's as good a place as any.

LUCRETIA

Here in the street?

THOMAS

Why rumor has it the King and Queen of this disgusting country can't be bothered to keep chamber pots —

LUCRETIA squats and pees.

THOMAS

Better?

SABRINA

God sees you!

LUCRETIA

So much better!

The trio enters a wig shop, where Thomas is kitted in foppish confection. The girls look at, but do not touch, the creations.

THOMAS

It's all Dukes, Marquises and Counts here — They are accustomed to no form of employment, to no kind of mental attention whatsoever!

Freshly powdered and with a beauty mark applied, THOMAS whisks next door to the haberdasher, the girls following, SABRINA laden down with a massive wig box as LUCRETIA saunters. As THOMAS speaks, he's bedecked with shiny new buckles, a pointy tricorne hat and a walking stick, crowned with a fleur-de-lis.

THOMAS

Their mornings are spent in dress and in sauntering about, and their afternoons in visits. In their chambers, you see a number of beings lolling, walking, standing, yawning, talking of the same trifling subjects every day — Until the happy moment arrives, which sets down the gaming table!

THOMAS shows the silver head of his walking stick to the girls.

THOMAS (CON'T)

The Fleur-de-lis is French for lily flower — long associated with the French crown. The lily was said to have sprung from the tears shed by Eve as she left Eden. From antiquity, it has been the symbol of purity. Look on it — And remember your place in this God forsaken land!

He rears the walking stick back, as if to hit them, then chuckles. The three enter a bakery, stacked high with colorful treats.

THOMAS

Everything drowns in sauces here — And I can't find a good cut of roast meat to save my soul, but my word, they do know how to make a cookie!

THOMAS chooses a pink macaron — And devours it.

THOMAS (CON'T)

Why, it tastes of roses and raspberries!

The girls eye the shop hungrily.

Now my dears, in order to stay fast to your spiritual elucidation, we shall not expose your weak minds to such dalliances. Plain food for plain girls. But for me, perhaps just one more. Or perhaps a dozen!

The girls carry a baker's box along to the coffeehouse, where they stand as THOMAS sits for refreshments.

THOMAS

Note how idleness corrupts all around us. Observe the number of people playing dice here, or sitting around the stove doing — nothing!

SABRINA

They've no interest in discussing politics or agriculture or science.

LUCRETIA

They're stupid!

THOMAS

Notice how they gape, yawn, get up and sit down again.

SABRINA

It's like watching monkeys pick each other's nits.

THOMAS flirts with a woman at the next table.

THOMAS

Paris is no place for children!

Scene Seven — Avignon and Birmingham

The space is split in three sections: A salon of the Lunar Society, back in Birmingham, a small one-room apartment that SABRINA and LUCRETIA share in Avignon and the streets of Avignon itself. The girls read together from a worn copy of a primer — With Day looking on, pacing.

THOMAS

Again, "In Adam's Fall, we sinned all."

SABRINA AND LUCRETIA

In Adam's Fall, we sinned all.

THOMAS

The Life to mend, God's Book attend.

SABRINA AND LUCRETIA

The Life to mend, God's Book attend.

THOMAS

Now just you, Lucretia.

LUCRETIA

(Struggling) The. Cat. Dot? Dot-h. Dothe?

SABRINA

(Whispers) Doth.

LUCRETIA

The Cat doth pl —

THOMAS

Play! Isn't it obvious?

LUCRETIA

The Cat doth play, and after sl —

THOMAS

Slay! Honestly, girl, are you willfully ignorant? Think of the context! Listen to Sabrina, how easily she performs.

SABRINA

A Dog will bite a thief at night.

THOMAS

Good Girl! See how she embraces the lesson? To another!

SABRINA

The Eagle's flight is out of sight.

LUCRETIA

What's an eagle?

THOMAS

Impertinence! Why —

SABRINA

She's just never seen an eagle, Sir.

THOMAS

Then to a digression into ornithology!

LUCRETIA

Really not necessary, Sir!

THOMAS

The word "ornithology" derives from the ancient Greek "ornis" — or bird — and "logos", or explanation.

LUCRETIA

Do you think we'll be allowed our supper soon, Sir?

THOMAS

Eagles are large, powerfully built birds of prey, with heavy heads and beaks. Like all birds of prey, eagles have very large, hooked beaks, for ripping flesh, strong, muscular legs, and powerful talons.

LUCRETIA

Can they fly out of sight?

THOMAS

Well, no, that's merely a rhyming convention.

LUCRETIA

Then why would they say that, Sir?

THOMAS

Your mind is a thick pudding!

SABRINA

It says in the book on nature that you gave us that eagles build their nests — called an eyrie — in tall trees or on high cliffs.

THOMAS

Promising!

SABRINA

Many species lay two eggs, but the older, larger chick frequently kills its younger sibling once it's hatched.

LUCRETIA

There's two of us — Watch me claws, Sabrina!

THOMAS

How many times must I? — “Watch *my* claws.”

SABRINA

The parents take no action to stop the killing.

THOMAS

A talon, Sabrina, is also the name for the part of a bolt against which the key presses to slide it into the lock.

SABRINA

Like the lock on our door?

THOMAS

That's for your safety.

LUCRETIA

Sabrina, we's like two chicks. We're high up — And we can't be reached.

THOMAS

Enough! — Onto the last. Sabrina, you recite. And put some feeling into it.

SABRINA

The Idle Fool is whipped at school. Job feels the rod and blesses God.

THOMAS

Very good. See, Lucretia, how she exerts herself?

SABRINA

The moon shines bright in time of night.

RICHARD

“Dear Mr. Edgeworth, I am glad to hear you are well, and your little boy, as well.”

THOMAS

I love Mr. Day dearly.

SABRINA

I love Mister Day, dearly, and Lucretia.

RICHARD

I love Mr. Day dearly, and Lucretia — and I am learning to write.

THOMAS

I do not like France as well as England.

SABRINA

The people here are very brown.

LUCRETIA

(Looking out the small window on a chair) Add that they dress oddly!

RICHARD

The climate is very good here.

THOMAS

Continue. I hope I shall have —

SABRINA

I hope I shall have more sense against, by the time that I come to England.

RICHARD

Sense against? Against what? Cheese?

BICKNELL

I've heard through my sources that he's tabulating their every word — how they eat, speak and drink. He studies how they move about, hoping he'll learn something about their inner spirit before he takes one of them to his bedchamber.

RICHARD

He's a thorough practitioner, I'll give him that!

BICKNELL

And his subjects have dutifully imbibed their liege's disdain for all things French!

RICHARD

I mean, all those sauces — Yuck! Shall I read on?

SABRINA

I know how to make an equilateral triangle — and I know the cause of day and night and of Summer and Winter.

RICHARD

“I love Mr. Day best in the world, Mr. Bicknell next, and then you, kind Sir.”

He looks up.

RICHARD (CON'T)

So, I'm to be last? Seems a bit unfair, doesn't it?

BICKNELL

Lowly indeed!

THOMAS

Good effort, Sabrina. This letter will be a fine indication of your midterm progress.

LUCRETIA looks at THOMAS expectantly.

THOMAS

My dear Lucretia, you are a simpler creature, of a lower phylum — aren't you? Like a vole, or a sea sponge, unaware of its own inabilities, yet quite content.

LUCRETIA

I'm sorry I displease you, Sir. I can take extra mending — It's just you ain't gots much to mend, a fine gentleman such as yourself.

THOMAS

Haven't got much — Never mind! Sabrina, I shall allow you to accompany me on my next outing to the village.

SABRINA

It's not fair! You always want to spend more time with her — She always gets to leave!

THOMAS

One should stand in constant reminder of one's origins. Why — You have no right to offer suggestions for our improvement, you ungrateful snit.

SABRINA

I deserve to leave! She still can't read or write — And I do her sums for her, Mister Day.

THOMAS

And so — you lie to me?

LUCRETIA

Sabrina — You promised!

THOMAS

Why is it that just when you're showing some promise, you revert back to this vile countenance? Can we not be anchored by virtue?

BICKNELL

It must be a strain for him — He's about as nurturing as a cuckoo clock.

RICHARD

The Philosopher Wet Nurse!

BICKNELL

But to be rewarded with a sweet, ripe cherry, lovingly tended to know only one master. I'll admit, I'm a little jealous.

RICHARD

He is a bit of a genius — A smiling cat, his paw on the tails of two mice.

THOMAS

No one leaves these confines until there is a fire in the hearth and supper on this table. If we didn't know better, we would think you girls were beginning to take on airs!

LUCRETIA

We're just — bored, Sir.

THOMAS

I drain my fortune to protect you.

SABRINA

It's just the ladies in the street — They've got pretty things.

THOMAS

Jewelry? Ribbons? Is that what you so desire? I've devoted my life to you —

LUCRETIA

We could offer you something more, Sir.

She steps closer to him.

THOMAS

Where have you learned this? You disgust me! Stop!

SABRINA

Can we have a cat? An orange one? A tabby?

BICKNELL

With Sabrina, I understand all of Day's projects are successful — But with the other one?

RICHARD

'Tis a pity he can't keep both.

They both laugh.

THOMAS

(To Lucretia) I've not seen in you, a single bit of progress!

BICKNELL

It gets on in the year. The contract requires he makes his decision soon. Do you suppose one girl stands out? He seems to favor the one he calls Sabrina.

RICHARD

(Flouncing about) Her ivory white skin, her shapely figure, her long-flowing neck and graceful — useless — arms. She sounds delightful! Like a small sofa or a potted plant.

BICKNELL

Everyone says that they're both quite pretty — But our man seeks the mind, too. And his year is almost up — He signed the contract, and he'll have to choose.

RICHARD

Discard one, and marry the other.

THOMAS

Back to your work. In geometry, an equilateral triangle —

SABRINA

— Is a triangle in which all three sides are equal.

BICKNELL

Do the girls know the bargain?

RICHARD

'Tis the richest pig of all — The story of Mister Day and his Perfect Wife has spread like the plague —

THOMAS

You two girls haven't a clue!

SABRINA

In the familiar Euclidean geometry, equilateral triangles are also equiangular; that is, all three internal angles are also congruent to each other and are each 60 degrees.

RICHARD

How could they?

THOMAS

And so we engage in scientific procedure — undertaken to make a discovery, to test a hypothesis, or to demonstrate a known fact.

SABRINA

Can I go outside, Sir?

LUCRETIA

You wants me to bring up the water for supper?

THOMAS

Subjunctive, Lucretia! Again.

LUCRETIA

Sir, would you —

SABRINA

I'll get it.

Cretin!

THOMAS

I'm sorry, Sir.

LUCRETIA

It's quite clear.

THOMAS

What's that, Sir?

SABRINA

She cannot learn.

THOMAS

I'll try harder!

LUCRETIA

THOMAS
It's simple that you lack the necessary warp and weft — Like a tapestry gone all slack,
your mind a jumble of wet, soggy, useless fibers.

LUCRETIA puts her face in her hands, crying.

Don't listen, Dorcas.

SABRINA

No such name!

THOMAS

We disappoints you.

LUCRETIA

Not your fault —

THOMAS

Leave her alone.

SABRINA

THOMAS
Do we blame the cripple for his own peg leg?

I ain't crippled!

LUCRETIA

THOMAS

Am not — And you are worse — Your mind — Bear no shame! And so ends this —

SABRINA

Ends what, Sir?

LUCRETIA

Do I displease you, Sir?

SABRINA

We're sorry, both me and Lucretia —

BICKNELL

What's the name of the castaway?

THOMAS

Her name is Dorcas.

Scene Eight — London, Fleet Street

A banner is unfurled that reads "Humphreys' Milliner and Haberdather, No 140, Fleet Street, LONDON." HUMPHREYS works on blocking a fancy lady's hat, but quickly puts down his efforts as THOMAS, SABRINA and LUCRETIA/DORCAS enter.

HUMPHREYS

Welcome, Sir, welcome ladies! We have on offer millinery in the newest style, with a variety of hosiery and gloves. Or are you just out for a bit of a morning ramble?

THOMAS

Don't touch anything, girls.

HUMPHREYS

Why, in one of me hats, you'll be a shining star in the British peerage!

THOMAS

We're not buying today, good Sir.

HUMPHREYS

We sells all sorts of women's apparel both new and — second hand.

THOMAS

Are you implying that I might require charity?

HUMPHREYS

Well, no, Sir, maybe just a bit of tailoring to mend that jacket? — And it's just the girls is dressed plain as well. But we offer a variety of silks, velvets, capuchins, damasks and all your *unmentionables* — stays, hoops — made in the gentlest manner, likening gives ready money for women's apparel rich or plain.

LUCRETIA/DORCAS

(Picks up a frilly bonnet) I like this one!

HUMPHREYS

A man what can increase his confidence — just with a swap to our hand-forged steely buttons! See how they shine? We also offer beaver men's hats — the height of fashion — made by my own two hands.

THOMAS

We're here with a proposition, Sir.

HUMPHREYS

You wouldn't be the first uses my shop as a confessional.

He points about the store at the many and varied hats on display.

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

The Toque Alexandre? La Dormeuse? Le chien couchant?

THOMAS

My ward — this girl, Lucretia — Dorcas — comes of age, and seeks a suitor.

HUMPHREYS

I can make any bonnet in plain or checked linen.

THOMAS

My dear Sir, what I wish is to make you a husband.

HUMPHREYS

To the child?

THOMAS

She's 13 now, well-educated and learned at basic skills. She'll make a fine companion. Tell him, Lucretia, of your charms.

LUCRETIA

I can sew, Sir, and mend. I learns — learned — cutting at the foundling hospital, though that were a lifetime ago now, Sir. And I can cook and clean for you's. Would be me pleasure to serve.

HUMPHREYS

But I'm a humble pattern draper —

THOMAS

And the girl shall be an asset to you. She's shrewd — High spirited!

HUMPHREYS

Let me see her fingers.

SABRINA

Her fingers, Sir?

HUMPHREYS

How else am I to know if she's every inch a yard?

He takes LUCRETIA's hands in his, studying both sides of them.

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

Soft skin — A youth. But to the palms. Yes, calloused, as I'd hope.

THOMAS

I'm obliged to moisturize the offer, to coat it in a bit of back fat.

Thomas takes a billfold out of his jacket.

THOMAS

Four hundred pounds, and with it — the unparalleled pleasures of matrimony.

HUMPHREYS

400 — My peach! Pick out any hat you like! And a cloak — It grows chilly. And we'll to perambulate — like an English Man of War lighting with his privateer.

LUCRETIA

We gets to go into the street together?

THOMAS

Get to go — Have the pleasure.

LUCRETIA

Can we visit a glinting shop? And can we buy an orange? Can we have some gingerbread? And I've heard of something called *chocolate*?

HUMPHREYS

I don't see why not — Jolly old girl, aren't you?

THOMAS

Not yet out of my sight, Lucretia — And already to decadence and depravity?

SABRINA

She's disgusting!

LUCRETIA

And I'd fancy a dog fight! Or maybe a puppet show? And a pudding — Oh, could we have a pudding stuffed with meat and oozing with butter?

SABRINA

Lucretia — Your *manners*.

LUCRETIA puts on a new hat and cloak.

THOMAS

You see, my dear Sabrina, see how the lower classes depend on bread and cake.

HUMPHREYS

That looks lovely, miss — What's her name?

DORCAS /THOMAS & SABRINA

My name's Lucretia/Her name is Dorcas.

HUMPHREY

400 pounds! Just lovely.

LUCRETIA

You sour so quickly, Sabrina! Fret not, at my wedding —

SABRINA

Such a baby — Look!

THOMAS

She disappoints —

HUMPHREYS

I do so promise to marry this charming creature in the future — And I shall resist all urges to consummate 'til then —

LUCRETIA

Of course, for good fortune, I must not sew the last stitch of my wedding dress until it's time to leave for the church — and once on my way, I must not look in a mirror!

HUMPHEYS

And you shall have the finest gown, my love. I'll tell the silkworms to begin their spinning immediately!

LUCRETIA

I only knows muslin.

THOMAS

Know, you *know*. A sturdy fabric —

SABRINA

My dress is fine — It's muslin.

LUCRETIA

Too rough for me — I'm delicate!

HUMPHREYS

Well, now, you's'll know the classic weaves — satin, tabby linen and the finest twill.

THOMAS

How readily you ensconce her innocent soul in deviling musk and jasmine flower! Is this a haberdashery, Mister Humphries — Or the Isle of lotus eaters?

HUMPHREYS

(*To LUCRETIA*) My regency, my royal princess!

HUMPHREYS lightly kisses up LUCRETIA's arm as he speaks:

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

Lampas liséré, moiré, damask, velvet and — corduroy.

THOMAS

This man tempts you into narcotic apathy — by means of textiles!

LUCRETIA

Will you be there on my wedding day — Sabrina — to protect me, from the evil spirits?

SABRINA

Your wedding day? Curtsy now —

THOMAS

Always so superstitious — please forgive —

SABRINA

It'll also be good luck to see a chimney sweep — or a black cat.

THOMAS

Where on earth did you pick up such nonsense?

LUCRETIA

And on leaving the house — as the bride — I shall step over piles of broken dishes. You will bring me some crockery, won't you, Sabrina? You can't stay cross forever!

THOMAS

Embrace, girls, and say goodbye.

SABRINA

Goodbye —

LUCRETIA

I shall have all the cheese I want — And I want an orange tabby!

THOMAS

I shall have my man draw up the papers.

HUMPHREYS

Hang an arse there, Gov. Allows me some clarification.

THOMAS

My heart is broken —

HUMPHREYS

So, what you's saying is me and the girl's what will receive this more than tidy sum each year — so long as she *and her progeny* — continue in good health?

THOMAS takes Lucretia's hands in his own.

THOMAS

“They started at once, and went about among the Lotus-eaters, who did them no hurt, but gave them to eat of the flower, which was so delicious that those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eaters without thinking further of their return.”

THOMAS drops Lucretia's hands and shakes his head at her.

HUMPHREYS

You don't do much to illuminate the situation —

THOMAS

Blood and hounds! You — belly-gutted cucumber! — You shall have your money! More than you've earned in a lifetime, every single year! I shall be your benefactor, your amencurler — the keeper of your House of Commons!

HUMPHREYS

No need for the clapper-claw — my good man! Comb me 'ead if you please, I's just ferreting out the particulars.

Overwhelmed, LUCRETIA begins to cry.

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

Well, now, we've done made the little lady cry, what wif our row. Sorry, miss, but I'm afraid the devil's amongst us.

HUMPHREYS hands LUCRETIA a handkerchief from his pocket.

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

The bride's dress is often white — which stands for joy!

HUMPHREYS takes a blue ribbon out of a box and kneels, draping the ribbon about Lucretia's feet. He looks up at his bride.

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

And she often wears a blue band at her hem — representing purity.

HUMPHREYS stands, pulling a white veil over Lucretia's face.

HUMPHREYS (CON'T)

Her veil is another way to hide her from the spirits — until safely in her husband's loving care. Do you like this one, my pretty dove? She is pure, ain't she, Sir?

LUCRETIA smiles, lifting her arms, enchanted. SABRINA weeps.

THOMAS

“Nevertheless, though they wept bitterly I forced them back to the ships and made them fast under the benches. Then I told the rest to go on board at once, lest any of them should taste of the lotus and leave off wanting to get home, so they took their places and smote the grey sea with their oars.”

Scene nine — Lichfield, spring 1770

On the terrace of the Seward family home in the Bishop's Palace — vacated years ago by the Bishop for even nicer digs. ANNA stands, orating, her father on a nearby divan, as HONORA listens intently, engaged in her embroidery.

ANNA

But say, Britannia, do thy sons, who claim
A birth-right liberty, dispense the same
In equal scales? Why then does Custom bind
In chains of Ignorance the female mind?

REVEREND SEWARD

You do flatter your papa with a recitation of my own ode.

ANNA

Why is to them the bright ethereal ray
Of science veil'd? Why does each pedant say,
"Shield me, propitious powers, nor clog my life
"With that supreme of plagues *a learned wife*.

HONORA

I remain, as always, in awe of you, my darling sister.

ANNA

"'Tis man's, with science to expand the soul,
"And wing his eagle-flight from pole to pole;
"'Tis his to pierce antiquity's dark gloom,
"And the still thicker shades of times to come!

REVEREND SEWARD

Do let your sister take the reins!

HONORA

"'Tis his to guide the pond'rous helm of state,
"And bear alone all wisdom's solid weight.

REVEREND SEWARD

And together?

ANNA AND HONORA

O! be they once in happiest union join'd,
And be that union in Athenia's mind.

They both clap for each other.

ANNA

Oh, my sweet Honora, ours is the most angelic kinship —

HONORA

And this our Eden. With my eternal gratitude, dear Papa!

REVEREND SEWARD

And your new coiffure, my dear — How it suits you.

ANNA

Thank you, Papa. I've just had it made in Paris. Do you like it?

REVEREND SEWARD

Why, in its stentorian presence, a man is but a flea, nay, a louse on a flea — A germ, on a louse on a flea.

HONORA

(Whining) I want a wig. When do I get a wig?

ANNA

When you're older, dear. Not yet.

REVEREND SEWARD

On your sister's shoulders, my dove, sits a weight that Atlas himself could not bear!

ANNA

It's not the heaviness, it's the attraction. With a cloud of mystery atop one's dome, one must be prepared for a tidal wave of woo.

HONORA

I want to be wooed!

REVEREND SEWARD

Your sweet sister only means to protect you.

ANNA

No one will take you from me, my dear Honora — Lest he be the perfect man.

REVEREND SEWARD

My fickle daughter, your standards defy all reason. It's as if logic were a truant school boy, flagrantly avoiding his master.

ANNA

Would you prefer I let our protégé to the claptrap of any old swain? It 'tis my duty to vet all suitors with scrupulous care.

HONORA

Without you, I am lost, dear sister.

REVEREND SEWARD

Well, you'll both be spinsters and your father in the Alms house if you don't hurry.

ANNA

I've a sharp eye out for her — And an ear for the latest chatter. Why I stand sentry in the full glare of Lichfield Society.

REVEREND SEWARD

I know you do, my duckling. And with the self-same incandescence as your departed mama.

ANNA

We've received a request just this morning —

She takes a small envelope from her bosom.

ANNA (CON'T)

I'd heard a fine gentleman had come to town — his ward in tow. This was brought round this morning — And comes from a Mister Thomas Day himself. Have you heard of him, Papa?

REVEREND SEWARD

A mutual friend, yes. Give it here.

He reads the letter, chuckling to himself.

ANNA

What amuses you?

REVEREND SEWARD

Give me my quill.

ANNA

Whatever for?

HONORA

I'll bring you your travel desk, papa.

REVEREND SEWARD

A most clever fellow! This is written in the oculist code, you see. It's a private language — You wouldn't understand.

He begins decoding with ANNA looking on.

ANNA

Arrows, shapes, and runes — Mathematical symbols and Roman letters. 'Tis some kind of cipher?

REVEREND SEWARD

This Day's a most amusing chap! Already a calling card that stands above the fray.

ANNA

But why's it written so poorly — Like a chicken's scratched it with its beak?

REVEREND SEWARD

Statute dictates that the author scribbles the code with his own plucked eyebrow hair! Have you tried it? 'Tis Lilliputian business!

HONORA

How fantastic! With his expertise in the area of miniatures, perhaps Mister Day could be of service to my needlework.

REVEREND SEWARD

Mind your cheek. I'm nearly finished!

ANNA

And what does this booted bantam's algorithm teach you? What are its unambiguous specifications — And more importantly — will there be claret and dancing?

The REVEREND SEWARD looks up from his decoding.

REVEREND SEWARD

Well, the sum of it is not so romantic — Fairly dry, really. He wishes to for a visit — And to bring his ward.

ANNA

I've heard of her! My maid says there's a gentleman parading allover Lichfield with a young girl — giving coins to beggars and holding court in every coffeehouse! He sounds dashing — And I long to hear of his adventures.

HONORA

And I should enjoy the company of another girl.

REVEREND SEWARD

Our home is the resort of every person – with any taste for letters. And this Mister Day comes highly recommended by our dear Edgeworth.

HONORA

Oh, Mister Edgeworth! I do wish he would return soon with his electrical marvels —

ANNA

I've heard that Day's been making handouts to Lichfield's poor and needy. And he's *already* made the rounds of the best-appointed drawing rooms.

REVEREND SEWARD

I shall send for him at once.

**Scene Twelve — In the gardens surrounding the Seward home,
Featuring manicured shrubbery and a refreshment tray**

*ANNA, REVEREND SEWARD, HONORA, THOMAS and
SABRINA are grouped in the sunshine, seeking shade.*

ANNA

You see, Mister Day, that from our home here on the hill, one enjoys the vistas of the region's two lakes — Called Minster, here, and Stowe, there.

REVEREND SEWARD

Yes, we seem buffered here from the creeping industrial Midlands — and can still offer the freethinker a peaceful walk and a proper green meadow.

HONORA

And parties! Oh, the most delightful card parties! And concerts and plays — We're going to a musical evening tomorrow night. The maestro Handel will be there. Have you heard him? He's divine! You must come, you simply must!

THOMAS

We'll have little time for such pursuits. I've let a home not far from here — Stowe house, where Sabrina shall continue her education.

ANNA

I can see your pretty villa from the windows of my dressing room. But how exotic, Mr. Day: A man and his ward — alone.

SABRINA

Though 'tis my pleasure to serve him, Mister Day is like a father to me, Miss.

THOMAS

She speaks in half-truths. Sabrina, child, thou knowest only service. See how easily confused she is? But such is the fate of foundlings —

REVEREND SEWARD

My dear girl! How fortunate for you that Mister Day came along when he did.

THOMAS

The children are provided for corporally, but they lack the security that only comes from reverent care – governesses, boarding schools.

REVEREND SEWARD

There's just no substitute for the compounding interest of a good, solid upbringing.

ANNA

Father — I want a foundling, too!

REVEREND SEWARD

My dear, it's not a stray kitten.

ANNA

I want a little orphan child, father, to dress and preen and rear in the best manner.

REVEREND SEWARD

You want a spaniel!

ANNA

Look on her — So fair, so wide-eyed. We've never had so sweet a changeling!

HONORA

(Sarcastically) Crown the girl with flowers, and make her all your joy!

ANNA

And jealous Honora would have the child Knight of her train, to trace the forests wild —
For butterflies!

HONORA

But Mister Day perforce withholds the loved girl — See how he dotes!

ANNA

I want a stolen child as amiable as Sabrina! Look how she patiently hangs on our every word!

REVEREND SEWARD

Like a Cavalier King, begging for a bone.

THOMAS

Your father is too correct —

REVEREND SEWARD

Look on her silky, smooth chestnut coat and the full-stop of her muzzle, not interbred with flat-nosed breeds!

ANNA

Papa! You are a scoundrel!

THOMAS

These months with the girl as my apprentice maid have been woefully trying.

REVEREND SEWARD

Long face, no stop, flat skull — Tell me, do you suppose she can keep up with a trotting horse? Because what else is a hunting dog good for?

THOMAS

I much doubt it. She is — For all intents and purposes — an imbecile!

Sabrina looks away.

THOMAS (CON'T)

But I never give up on her.

ANNA

Sabrina, let's you and I walk together. Here — take my fan.

ANNA offers SABRINA a decorative fan.

SABRINA

May I, Mister Day?

THOMAS

'Tis but an object, like any other. A comb, a copper pot —

SABRINA takes the fan and holds it awkwardly.

ANNA

Why, you've no idea how to use one. Mister Day, how have you kept the child from such essential communications?

HONORA

Even I know the signals. I've learned them at parties!

SABRINA

The signals, Miss?

REVEREND SEWARD

Day, a drink?

THOMAS

Thank you, Sir!

ANNA

It's a kind of semaphore, a language of love. Each flick of the fan has its own emotion. Honora will demonstrate.

As ANNA speaks, HONORA holds her fan in distinctive gestures, which SABRINA tries to copy, as the REVEREND SEWARD and THOMAS look on from behind their glasses.

ANNA (CON'T)

Ignore the gentlemen. The schoolyard pinching match is the extent of their collective refinement.

REVEREND SEWARD

Oh, I do love a pinching match! What say you, Day? Care to wager?

REVEREND SEWARD and THOMAS pinch each other's ears, holding their drinks with their free hands.

ANNA

Now, Sabrina, when one is fearful, one holds a fan like this. Yes, that's it. Very good. And when one is betrayed — Oh! Then it's a strike! No, Honora, not like you're scolding a dog. Like this, always with an element of restraint. Now you, Sabrina.

SABRINA

'Tis rather fun!

ANNA

Pay attention, Mister Day. This is the code for love.

The two men give up the pinching match and rub their ears. HONORA gestures 'love' with her fan, SABRINA follows.

THOMAS

Unrelenting twaddle!

ANNA

Honora, give Miss Sabrina your fan.

HONORA

I don't want to!

ANNA

Then give it to me, and she can keep mine. (*To Sabrina*) Mine has the poet Samuel Johnson written upon it — Helpful when a party is dull. Do you know him?

SABRINA

I'm sorry, Miss.

ANNA

(*Reading her fan.*) "Delusive Fortune hears the incessant call. They mount, they shine, evaporate and fall."

REVEREND SEWARD

Dreams, hopes, plans —

THOMAS

The Vanity of Human Wishes!

The men clink glasses. ANNA hands her fan to SABRINA.

ANNA

Which lake do you fancy?

SABRINA

I don't know.

ANNA

Minster or Stowe?

SABRINA

Whichever you prefer.

ANNA

Let's towards Stowe.

SABRINA

Near my home?

ANNA

It's not far —

SABRINA

Yes, ma'am, thank you.

ANNA

Call me Anna!

SABRINA

Yes, Miss Anna.

ANNA

Honora — you, too!

ANNA faces THOMAS — She is onto him.

ANNA

Chapter eight — In which our Knight is tantalized with a transient Glimpse of Felicity.

THOMAS

You do entreat —

ANNA

Chapter seventeen — Containing Adventures of chivalry equally new and surprising.

REVEREND SEWARD

She reads satire!

THOMAS

She fires a gun —

ANNA

Chapter eighteen — In which the rays of courtesy shine with renovated luster.

THOMAS

‘Tis fiddlestick’s!

ANNA

Chapter twenty-four — The Knot that puzzles human wisdom, the hand of Fortune will untie.

The three women exit.

REVEREND SEWARD

So, Day, high marks for your codex.

THOMAS

Thank you, Sir.

REVEREND SEWARD

I kept its contents secret, of course. Too many common cowans about — they'd wink the news for sure, but it's safe with me. I swear —

THOMAS

'Twas my intention.

REVEREND SEWARD

Now give us your token!

They shake hands — With the secret grip of a master mason.

REVEREND SEWARD

So mote it be!

RICHARD

(From offstage) I see you've traveled some — Are you a widow's son?

THOMAS

What on Earth — Did you know Etheridge would be here today?

REVEREND SEWARD

You're not the only one good at keeping secrets, Day.

Richard enters gaily.

RICHARD

How old is your mother?

REVEREND SEWARD

My mother improves daily!

RICHARD greets THOMAS — With a secret grip, grinning.

RICHARD

Grand Inspector Inquisitor Commander!

REVEREND SEWARD

Might I offer you a dram?

RICHARD

I could take a spot — for my humors!

REVEREND SEWARD

Here's a facer —

THOMAS
How's your sister?

RICHARD
Sister well — Engaged!

THOMAS
Engaged? Why — I might flay —

RICHARD
Wouldst thou have her remain a thornback?

THOMAS
The lady isn't worth three skips of a louse!

RICHARD
My mopus — when it came to wooing my sister you were as lazy as a tinker who puts his mallet down to fart!

REVEREND SEWARD
Be kind, Sir! Our Mister Day is a person in difficulties —

RICHARD
Thomas Day, Esquire — King of the Pointless Undertakings.

THOMAS
Enough —

RICHARD
Tell us, how goes your rabbit hunt with a dead ferret?

REVEREND SEWARD
Let's get groggified!

THOMAS
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was —

RICHARD
(*To SEWARD*) Was he rocked in a stone kitchen?

REVEREND SEWARD
Now — Who's for cards?

Honora runs in, chasing after a butterfly with a net, and giggling.

RICHARD

And where goes thou in such a whorl?

HONORA

It's for papa's collection — Papilionidae — a swallowtail!

REVEREND SEWARD

Steady on, girl! Oh— You nearly had him!

RICHARD

Are you sure it's not a skipper? — Or maybe a vagrant?

HONORA

Vagrants? In Lichfield? Look at its wing pattern! — It has distinctive eye spots.

RICHARD

I find it difficult to focus on the identification and classification of rogue insects —

HONORA

Mister Etheridge, will you help me catch it?

REVEREND SEWARD

Good show!

RICHARD

But I'm so distracted by this creature before me, whose primary color seems to be yellow, and whose eyes are blue!

HONORA and RICHARD run offstage, chasing the butterfly.

THOMAS

(Calling after RICHARD) I would remind you of your marital status!

ANNA calls from off stage.

ANNA

HONORA! We are now to poetry in the glade!

RICHARD and HONORA run on and offstage as THOMAS speaks.

THOMAS

This chewing caterpillar dallies idly amongst Queen Anne's Lace, violets, marigolds —
She is not for you, Sir!

ANNA calls from off stage once more.

ANNA

Come now! You'll be Iphigenia and we'll have young Sabrina here play Agamemnon!

HONORA charges onstage, swiping the air with her net.

HONORA

I got it! Papa — Look!

RICHARD re-enters, winded.

REVEREND SEWARD

Like Artemis herself!

RICHARD

The tiny huntress!

HONORA hands her net to RICHARD, and carefully extricates the butterfly, placing it into a glass from the men's refreshment tray.

HONORA

When one wants to use a killing jar, one pours alcohol onto the paper, like this.

She demonstrates, using Day's codex as a blotter.

HONORA (CON'T)

Then one carefully drains off any fluid that is not absorbed by the paper.

RICHARD

Never was there a more adorable jailer!

HONORA

Then, to comfort the creature in its last moments, one puts in a few narrow blades of grass. Could you help me, Mister Etheridge?

THOMAS

Disgusting.

RICHARD stoops to pick a few blades of grass.

RICHARD

Will these do, my dear?

HONORA

These give the insect a place to hide.

RICHARD

Hide from what?

HONORA

It's just what's done — It's humane.

Honora gestures for RICHARD's pocket square, which he gives to her, kissing it first. She looks down, embarrassed but smiling, and places it over the captured butterfly, giving it to her father.

HONORA

For your collection!

REVEREND SEWARD

Shall we add it now?

HONORA

Oh, please!

REVEREND SEWARD

Etheridge, will you do the pinning?

RICHARD

I'm warning you, my dear girl. I may faint at the sight of blood — And you shall be forced to revive me.

HONORA

Butterflies don't bleed. They just lay there, like this.

She makes a shape of a butterfly.

RICHARD

All the better!

THOMAS

Stay strong, my man at arms.

RICHARD

Dear girl, will you guide my hand?

HONORA

If it'll get me out of playing the doomed daughter of the Greek King yet again —

She takes RICHARD's hand.

RICHARD

I think a bit of Euripides might be fun! Let's sit on tripods —

RICHARD and HONORA begin to exit.

HONORA

Papa? Are you coming?

REVEREND SEWARD

(To the dead butterfly.) Oh, wake once more! How rude so'er the hand that ventures o'er thy magic maze to stray; Oh, wake once more! Though scarce my skill command Some feeble echoing of thine earlier lay.

HONORA and RICHARD exit, with REVEREND SEWARD following

THOMAS

I hear from afar the shouts of that false wisdom which is ever dragging us onwards, counting the present as nothing, and pursuing without pause a future, which flies as we pursue, that false wisdom which removes us from our place — and never brings us to any other.

SABRINA re-enters, wearing an oddly-fashioned Greek headdress and carrying a child's wooden boat — Carved like a vessel from ancient Greece. THOMAS stares at her, angrily.

SABRINA

Sir, I displease.

She quickly removes her costume.

THOMAS

I've accidentally killed a deer — And in a sacred grove.

SABRINA

Mister Day?

He takes her boat — Holding it aloft.

THOMAS

I'll be punished — My fleet will not sail to Troy!

SABRINA

I don't understand —

THOMAS

I've brought you here to Aulis under pretext, but thou see'st not the ruse.

SABRINA

Aulis, Sir? I thought this was Lichfield?

THOMAS

Thought. It's *thought*. Sweet simple girl — You remain unaware.

SABRINA

Of what, Sir?

THOMAS

Apollo there! Healer indeed, I call on you,
lest Artemis make contrary winds for the Danaans,
long delays that keep the ships from sailing,
in her urge for a second sacrifice,
one with no music, no feasting,
an architect of feuds born in the family,
with no fear of the man;
for there stays in wait a fearsome, resurgent,
treacherous keeper of the house, an unforgetting Wrath which avenges children.

Scene 13 — Stowe House, Interior
A quiet, secluded villa

SABRINA

I've finished with the floors, Sir? Will you be wanting supper soon?

THOMAS

We shall require the cold pheasant, yes. There's bread for you, Sabrina.

SABRINA

Yes, Sir.

THOMAS

Can't have you molly-coddled with the sweets Miss Seward slips you.

SABRINA

No, Mister Day.

THOMAS

Let's a game!

SABRINA
Sir?

THOMAS
It's one Miss Seward taught me.

SABRINA
Oh, Miss Seward — Have you see her?

THOMAS
Yes, of course.

SABRINA
Could I go, too? —

THOMAS
It's called a jingling match. Come here — I shall put this bell on.

SABRINA
A bell, Sir?

THOMAS
With your help?

SABRINA ties a jingling bell around THOMAS's neck.

SABRINA
Like a cat!

THOMAS
Yes, just so. Now — This blindfold.

SABRINA
For me, Sir?

THOMAS ties a blindfold over SABRINA's eyes.

THOMAS
Can you see?

SABRINA
No, nothing Sir.

THOMAS
Now try to catch me!

THOMAS darts around the space, with SABRINA reaching and moving towards him. The game is light-hearted at first, but provides opportunities for him to come in too close to her, to trip and bump into her.

THOMAS (CON'T)

You have no skill or patience!

The game ends, THOMAS laughing.

THOMAS

I've an experiment for you.

SABRINA

But the pheasant, Sir? You wants it with the coffin, or plain?

THOMAS

Do you want it? — No, "would you like it?"

SABRINA

Would you like the pheasant in its —

THOMAS

With its crust?

SABRINA

With its crust?

THOMAS

Right here, that's a girl. Turn away from me.

SABRINA

Like this, Sir?

THOMAS

It is time.

SABRINA

Time for what?

THOMAS

Take down your dress.

SABRINA

Mister Day?

THOMAS

Just to the shoulder — Won't take a minute.

SABRINA

But lunch, Sir?

THOMAS

Tiresome Sabrina — Now.

SABRINA

What's that, Sir?

THOMAS

Sealing wax.

SABRINA

What for, Sir?

THOMAS

For you, child.

SABRINA

Shall I write a letter, Sir? To Mister Etheridge?

THOMAS

No, Sabrina. Go on.

He gestures for her to disrobe from the waist up.

THOMAS (CON'T)

Let us be simpler and less vain.

THOMAS pours hot wax on SABRINA's shoulder and arm. She screams.

THOMAS

Interesting. I shall note this reaction in my experiment ledger.

As THOMAS moves to his journal and SABRINA cleans her wound and dresses, ANNA and HONORA enter, walking through their garden. They both wear flowery smocks and bonnets decorated with garish fruits and vegetables. ANNA snips roses, which she puts in a basket carried by HONORA.

ANNA

Her spirit could not be armed against the dread of pain, and the appearance of danger. When he dropped melted sealing-wax upon her arms she did not endure it heroically.

ANNA and HONORA exit.

SABRINA

And for dinner, Sir?

THOMAS

Ah, Sabrina. How goes your day?

SABRINA

Fine, Sir. I've done the —

THOMAS

Never mind. So boring!

SABRINA

Sorry, Sir. The chicken then?

THOMAS

Yes, fine. And you may finish your groats.

SABRINA

Yes, Sir. Is that all?

THOMAS

One more thing. Your arm — Yes, here.

SABRINA

I don't want —

THOMAS

The soft underside.

SABRINA

But please, Sir.

THOMAS

Remember the butterfly?

SABRINA

Sir, no, please.

THOMAS

No real pleasure.

THOMAS pushes a straight pin into SABRINA's inner forearm, she shudders, tears rolling down her face.

THOMAS

You do disappoint!

THOMAS notes his results. The focus shifts to BICKNELL, chatting with a London coffee house companion.

BICKNELL

What Miss Seward says respecting Sabrina's not bearing pain heroically is not true. I have seen her drop melted sealing wax voluntarily on her arm and bear it heroically without flinching.

SABRINA

Eggs for breakfast?

THOMAS

Look, a present!

He holds up a large dress box.

SABRINA

For me, Sir?

THOMAS

Yes, for you!

SABRINA

What is it?

THOMAS

Open it, girl.

SABRINA

It's lovely, Sir.

THOMAS

You like it?

SABRINA

I do, Sir.

THOMAS

Cut and color?

Very pretty, Sir.	SABRINA
What say you?	THOMAS
Thank you, Sir.	SABRINA
Hold it up!	THOMAS
Like this, Sir?	SABRINA
Note the feel —	THOMAS
It's soft, Sir.	SABRINA
You look lovely.	THOMAS
Thank you, Sir.	SABRINA
Now burn it.	THOMAS
Burn it, Sir?	SABRINA
In the fire.	THOMAS
What for, Sir?	SABRINA
You fail our test.	THOMAS
What test, Sir?	SABRINA

THOMAS
Your uniform suffices!

SABRINA
Yes, indeed, Sir.

THOMAS points to a fireplace, where SABRINA places the dress and box. The sound of crackling fire and the glow of hot flames.

THOMAS
Watch it burn!

SABRINA
I'm sorry, Sir.

The focus shifts to RICHARD, gossiping at a party

RICHARD
We were told of her throwing a box of finery into the fire at his request! Can you imagine? Sometimes I wish I were a philosopher.

THOMAS, carrying a wooden box, leads SABRINA towards the lake next to Stowe House.

THOMAS
Do keep up!

SABRINA
But Sir, dinner?

THOMAS
Your incessant stomach!

SABRINA
Not mine, Sir.

THOMAS
This is perfect.

SABRINA
What is, Sir?

THOMAS
Stand just there.

SABRINA
What for, Sir?

THOMAS
Just do it!

SABRINA
Like this, Sir?

THOMAS
Yes, stand still.

He takes out a pistol, and begins loading it.

SABRINA
Sir, I just —

THOMAS
The miserable, that really pinch and suffer want.

SABRINA
Miss Seward says —

THOMAS
The poor, that fare hard. The country people, farmers, and company, who fare indifferently —

SABRINA
Please Sir, no —

THOMAS
Do you like spiders? I like spiders. They spin their homes from nothing.

SABRINA
I like spiders —

THOMAS
I particularly desire every person who approaches you to regulate his behavior.

THOMAS aims it at SABRINA.

SABRINA
Sir, I beg —

THOMAS fires a shot into SABRINA's skirts. She screams, taking her skirts up, she finds the bullet hole, as he reloads.

THOMAS

The middle sort, who live well. The working trades, who labor hard, but feel no want.

SABRINA

I'm sorry, Sir —

THOMAS

The rich, who live plentifully. I always discourage every appearance of indolence.

THOMAS fires again into her skirts.

THOMAS (CON'T)

I'm sufficiently entitled.

THOMAS reloads.

THOMAS (CON'T)

The Great, who live profusely, have placed you in circumstances infinitely more favorable to happiness than before.

SABRINA

Take me back!

THOMAS

To the miserable?

SABRINA

To the hospital!

THOMAS steps away from her, looking up and out.

THOMAS

Look, Sabrina, at the passage of the moon, rising in the sky. And with it a constellation of babies and children, raised on bottles of chalk dust and opium, mutilated at the hands of their own nurses, to be hired out to beggars. See how it rises? Look — on the failed experiment.

THOMAS shoves his scientific ledger at SABRINA.

SABRINA

I'll kill meself.

THOMAS

I'll kill *myself*. — And 'tis against the law. They'll bury you at a crossroads, with a stake through your cold, irrational heart.

SABRINA

Please Sir, I —

THOMAS carefully packs his musket in its case, as SABRINA stands shaking. The focus moves to the REVEREND SEWARD, at a drunken meeting of the Lunar Society.

REVEREND SEWARD

Nothing surely can be more absurd than the principle of this plan of education — or more impractical. Day suffers from delusion created by heated imagination and deeply sunk into his impressionable young mind.

We move to the lakeside, near Stowe house. A cool, clammy winter breeze blows bare branches.

SABRINA

I've never been so close to the water's edge before, Sir.

THOMAS

I am not your jailer.

SABRINA

Yes, Sir.

THOMAS

Now go in.

SABRINA

In where, Sir?

THOMAS

In the lake.

SABRINA

I can't swim —

THOMAS

Just walk in.

SABRINA

Into the lake?

As I said!

THOMAS

It's cold, Sir.

SABRINA

I know that!

THOMAS

My dress, Sir.

SABRINA

Off you go!

THOMAS

I'll stop complaining.

SABRINA

About what now?

THOMAS

SABRINA
My chores, Sir. My studies — I'll do as you say, Sir! Please, Sir.

THOMAS gestures for SABRINA to walk into the lake, and she does, exiting. The focus shifts to ANNA and HONORA, working at needlepoint.

ANNA
The difficulty seems to lie in giving her motive to exertion, self-denial and heroism. Fear has greatly the ascendant of affection, and fear is a cold and indolent feeling. Mister Day has made her miserable — A slave and company!

SABRINA re-enters, soaked to the skin from head to toe.

Lie down here.

THOMAS

I'm so cold.

SABRINA

As I say!

THOMAS

SABRINA lays down on the ground, face up.

SABRINA

Sir, would you take me? Please, no, I —

THOMAS crouches, and traces the outline of SABRINA's body with one finger.

THOMAS

No one hears!

SABRINA

(Yelling) Miss Seward! Anna!

THOMAS

I perceive God everywhere in His works. I sense Him in me; I see Him all around me!

THOMAS holds her down, first at the ankles, and then advance, patting further up her body.

THOMAS

Patty Cake, Patty Cake,
Baker's Man;
That I will Master,
As fast as I can;
Pat it and prick it,
And mark it with a T,
And there will be enough for Tommy and me.

SABRINA

(Yelling and thrashing) Please help me!

THOMAS

When I took you in, you were articulated to me as a servant. It was in that capacity I received you and talked to you. My whole behavior was in unison to that idea, excepting the admitting you to sit with me and raising you above the common drudgery of a family.

THOMAS releases SABRINA. She scrabbles away.

SABRINA

I don't understand!

THOMAS

You have failed every test!

SABRINA

What tests, Sir?

I never violated — THOMAS

I'm freezing, Sir. SABRINA

I should send you away — THOMAS

To where, Sir? SABRINA

To a trade! THOMAS

A trade, Sir? SABRINA

You've no value. THOMAS

I'm sorry, Sir. SABRINA

To where you began! THOMAS

I didn't know — SABRINA

You lack promise. THOMAS

I wish I — SABRINA

And all reasonable design! THOMAS

Sir, please, just— SABRINA

THOMAS

The terms state that you are to be wed to the son of Mister Etheridge.

SABRINA
The terms, Sir?

THOMAS
Never forget my benevolence.

SABRINA
I am grateful.

THOMAS
Go! Just leave.

SABRINA
I'm free then?

THOMAS
Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains.

SABRINA
All my misfortunes —

THOMAS
Those who think themselves the masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they.

SABRINA
Goodbye then, Sir.

THOMAS
Yes, goodbye, Anne.

SABRINA
I shall write.

THOMAS
And I'll attend.

Wet and sopping, SABRINA begins to exit, stops to look back at THOMAS, then turns away from him, and smiles broadly.

THOMAS
I loved an imaginary being.

The houselights come up to half, then full. SABRINA looks around at the audience.

SABRINA

To the future.

Blackout. Punk music plays.