

Seeking Mister Hyde

By

David Bareford

SEEKING MISTER HYDE

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SEEKING MISTER HYDE

Seeking Mister Hyde was originally produced at Love Street Playhouse of Woodland, WA featuring the following cast and crew:

LOUIS.....John San Nicolas
FANNY.....Julisa L. Wright
HYDE.....Henry Lorch
HENLEY/SILVER.....Parth Ruparel
KATHARINE.....Laura Henderson
BAXTER/UTTERSON/CAPTAIN.....Tony Provenzola
ADDY/LIZZIE.....Kristen Bennett
ENFIELD.....Brenda McGinnis
LOUIS (understudy).....Jack Harvison

Artistic Director/Producer.....Melinda Pallotta
Managing Director/Producer.....Lou Pallotta
Director.....David Bareford
Stage Manager.....Alisa Brossia
Set Design.....David Bareford
Lighting Design.....Mikail Nordquist
Composer/Sound Design.....Fawzy Simon
Costume Design.....Sabrena Worthy
Properties Design.....Michele Glover
Violence Design.....David Bareford
Wig Design.....Melinda Pallotta
Wig Assistant.....Kathleen Pereles
Sound Board.....Alex Girard
Light Board.....Kennedy Flatt
Stage Dressing/Construction.....Melinda Pallotta
Lou Pallotta

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CHARACTERS

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, mid thirties, known as LOUIS, Scottish author

FRANCES “FANNY” STEVENSON, mid forties, American, Louis’s wife

WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY, English poet, prosthetic left leg

KATHARINE STEVENSON DE MATTOS, author, Louis’s first cousin

CHARLES BAXTER, lawyer, longtime friend of Louis

ADELAIDE BOODLE, young aspiring author, Louis’s neighbor

REVEREND WALTER JEKYLL, vicar of Bournemouth

DOROTHY ENFIELD, a nurse

EDWARD HYDE, an apparition, from *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*

LONG JOHN SILVER, the famous one-legged pirate from *Treasure Island*

CAPTAIN HOSEASON, a sailor, from *Kidnapped*

MR UTTERSON, lawyer, from *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*

LIZZIE CHANTRELLE, murdered wife of Eugene Chantrelle

DOUBLING: (4m, 4w)

SILVER/HENLEY

HYDE/REVEREND

CAPTAIN/BAXTER/UTTERSON

ADELAIDE/LIZZIE

TIME: late October, 1885.

SETTING: The interior of Skerryvore, the Stevenson’s modest villa in Bournemouth, England. On one side of the stage is the Blue Room: a small parlor with the front door, a sitting area, and an archway leading to other parts of the house. A painting of a tall, storm-swept lighthouse features prominently on one wall. The other half of the stage, divided by a wall and door, is a Drawing Room furnished as an office in gentlemanly style with a standing desk and an upholstered chaise strewn with blankets. A few discarded papers lie on the floor, marred with aborted handwriting. A fireplace has a mantel covered with pill boxes, small medicine vials, and dosing cups.

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ACT I
SCENE 1

The interior of Skerryvore, on a dreary late October day in 1885. FANNY sits on the chaise. She is dressed modestly but is curiously barefoot. In her hands is a stack of pages, and she reads the way a surgeon operates. We hear the cries of gulls and the creak of ship's timbers. Long John SILVER, in full pirate regalia, leans on his crutch, cutlass in hand, peering out the drawing room door but seeing the main deck of a ship stretched out before him.

LOUIS, a bohemian and swashbuckling soul trapped in a chronic invalid's brittle frame, runs into the Blue Room and dashes through the drawing room door.

LOUIS. They're coming! We've kicked up a hornet's nest, to be sure!

SILVER. To arms, lad! We'll make our stand in the roundhouse here! I'll hold this door; 'tis where the main fight will break. *(Moving his sword in the doorway, imagining the fight.)* I'll have to stick to the point, and that's a pity, too. It doesn't set me genius, which is all for the upper guard.

LOUIS. *(Pointing at an unseen door.)* But what if they come 'round through the galley?

SILVER. If they lay a hand upon the galley door, ye're to shoot, savvy? And think, lad, what else have ye to guard?

LOUIS. The window! But that makes no sense! I'd need eyes on both sides of my head! For when my face is to the one, surely my back is to the other!

SILVER. And have ye no oars on your skull, boy?

LOUIS. *(Louis stops, confused. He seems to drop his "character.")* Sorry...oars? *(Silver shrugs and points at Fanny. Louis peers over Fanny's shoulder, points to a word on the page.)* Ah. Ears. That's "ears."

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FANNY. (*squinting at the page*) Oh. Oh, yes, that makes much more sense. Your handwriting is...

SILVER. (*Jumping back in.*) And have ye no ears on your skull, boy?

LOUIS. To be sure! I must hear the bursting of the glass!

SILVER. Ye have some rudiments of sense.

CAPTAIN. (*CAPTAIN Hoseason enters with cutlass drawn.*) Mister Stewart! It doesn't have to be like this! You're going to hand over that money belt, and we'll set you down safe on the coast!

SILVER. Beggin' your pardon, Cap'n Hoseason, sir, but I'm afeared that shan't come to pass. The gold I bear is not mine to give ye, more's the pity! This partic'lar treasure is for the Jacobite rebels. I merely safeguard its delivery. Try to claim it at your own peril.

CAPTAIN. So be it. (*To an unseen crew.*) Have at him, boys! (*The Captain rushes the door. A furious sword fight ensues through the doorway. Suddenly there is a CRASH of shattering glass.*)

SILVER. Davie! Look to your window, boy! (*Louis draws a pistol and FIRES. There is a CRY OF PAIN.*)

LOUIS. I got him! I shot Mister Shaun!

SILVER. Well done, boy! (*Silver passes his sword through the body of the Captain, who falls dead.*) And there's another dead Whig, for ye!

LOUIS. They're running, Mister Stewart!

SILVER. That's right, ye cowards! Come back when ye want some more! (*There is a moment to breathe. Louis and Silver look at each other, happy. They both turn to regard Fanny, who still reads. The pause becomes awkward.*)

LOUIS. (*To Fanny.*) That's what I have so far. (*Fanny compares her current page to an earlier one. A long moment.*)

SILVER. (*Privately, to Louis.*) It be strangely quiet, lad. That queer sort a' calm a'fore a squall... (*Silver speaks, but Fanny seems not to be able to hear him.*)

LOUIS. Fanny?

FANNY. I'm sure it'll be a fine story.

LOUIS. Och, wife, dinnae hide what you're thinking! I know you better'n that. As Will Shakespeare says, "Tell truth and shame the devil!" (*A dark figure emerges, seemingly through the drawing room wall itself. This is*

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our first glimpse of HYDE. His physicality is shrunken, twisted, and unsettling; his voice (which we will hear later) is menacing and dark but incongruently eloquent and precise. Fanny seems not to notice him, but Louis does, and his emergence has an immediate physical effect on Silver and the Captain. The Captain stands up quickly, as if preparing for fight or flight, while Silver squares off with the newcomer.)

SILVER. You had to go namin' the devil, Stevenson...

FANNY. I have a...question or two, but you're the author, Louis.

SILVER. *(To Louis)* Who be this blighter? Can you make him shove off?

LOUIS. *(To Silver.)* I suppose, but I need your help.

FANNY. Really, Louis? You've never asked my help with stories before. You've always been the one helping me.

LOUIS. *(To Fanny)* I'm...asking for it now. To quote Dickens: "to have a Critic on the Hearth is the luckiest thing in all the world!"

FANNY. It was *Cricket* on the Hearth, Dickens wrote, not *Critic*.

LOUIS. Can you nae be both for me? In my hour of need?

FANNY. So dramatic. But very well, I shall try. First, why is Long John Silver in this book?

LOUIS. What? He's not! That's Alan Breck Stewart, hero of the Jacobite rebellion!

FANNY. Because he sounds just like Long John. I'm surprised he doesn't have a missing leg and a crutch! *(Silver hides his crutch. Louis's laugh is somewhat forced.)*

LOUIS. John Silver? That's ridiculous! This story doesn't even have *pirates!*

SILVER. Aye, and the tale's the poorer for it, says I!

FANNY. And about the captain... *(Hyde advances to the captain and points to the wall. The Captain quickly exits out the same magical way that Hyde entered.)*

LOUIS. *(Calling after him.)* Hoseason!

FANNY. Yes. Captain Hoseason. Alan Breck kills him, and Davie Balfour shoots the sailing master.

LOUIS. Mister Shaun.

FANNY. And he dies too? *(Louis nods.)* Huh. Unfortunate, that.

LOUIS. You don't understand. I *need* to kill the captain to make the crew

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retreat. The blow to their morale, an' all. And Davie *must* kill Mister Shaun to have a crisis of conscience! Later I'll explore his guilt about it. Davie's never before killed a man.

FANNY. I *do* understand, Louis. I know how stories work. But I also know the captain and the sailing master are the only two on a ship who know how to navigate!

LOUIS. That's...a fair point. (*Hyde now approaches Silver and Louis.*)

SILVER. Look alive! He's tackin' this way!

FANNY. And there's also a feeling I have about...well, it's a trifle...

LOUIS. (*To Hyde.*) Why will you not speak your mind?

FANNY. Oh, all right. Your protagonist for this one...Davie Balfour...he's shaping up to be another Jim Hawkins.

LOUIS. Eh? My readers *love* Jim Hawkins! They write me letters telling me so! What's wrong with Jimmy, now, I pray you?

FANNY. Don't spark your Scotch temper at me. There's nothing *wrong* with Jim, or bad. Or particularly *good*. He's a cipher. We finish *Treasure Island* not knowing him much at all. Now it's happening with Davie Balfour. I mean, who is he? (*Hyde laughs cruelly.*)

SILVER. Stevenson, who be this blighter?

LOUIS. (*To Silver.*) I don't know who he is...

FANNY. And that's exactly what's coming through on the page. We're not learning anything *about* him.

LOUIS. (*Still to Silver.*) Maybe he's not important...

FANNY. Not important? He's the protagonist! (*Pause.*) Louis, are you...You seem distracted.

LOUIS. I'm fine. But remember, the tale's only four chapters in!

FANNY. Yes! Four chapters! And already his father has died, his uncle tried to kill him, he's been shanghai'd on a boat to America, met a Jacobite outlaw, and shot a man in a desperate siege! And who is Davie? *I don't know!* He's...innocent and good-hearted and brave and trusting--

LOUIS. And that's *bad*? He's the hero of the story!

FANNY. But he doesn't feel...true to life.

LOUIS. It's art. It's not *supposed* to be life! Art is *designed*. It's honed. Life is...well, it's a bloody mess!

FANNY. Yes, but in my opinion / there's a lot--

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LOUIS. Your *opinion*, your opinion! I should think editors and literary critics are better judges / of my--

FANNY. You're the one who asked me to--

LOUIS. What have *you* published, three short stories? (*The temperature in the room drops thirty degrees.*)

FANNY. What did you say?

SILVER. I should be goin'... (*Silver makes his exit out the drawing room wall.*)

LOUIS. I merely point out I've written *Inland Voyage*, *The Black Arrow*, *Silverado Squatters*--

FANNY. (*Overlapping.*) Robert Louis, I know perfectly well what you've writ--

LOUIS. (*Overlapping.*) *New Arabian Nights*, *Prince Otto*, and *Treasure bloody Island!* I know how to write a damn novel, Fan! I-- (*A sudden and severe cough interrupts him, but he recovers.*) I'm sorry if my characters aren't-- (*Another cough.*) --if they aren't "*true to life*" enough for you, but the *professional* critics seem to-- (*The coughing becomes worse, wracking his body with lung-rattling hacks and wheezes.*)

FANNY. The morphine syrup! (*Louis stumbles to the mantel. Uncorks a medicine bottle and tries to pour it into a minim glass. It is empty, but Fanny can't see this. He glances back at her. Coughs.*) Well, take it! (*Louis pretends to drink medicine from the empty cup. After a moment, his coughs subside anyway. Hyde exits through the wall.*)

LOUIS. I'm fine, Cricket.

FANNY. It's getting worse.

LOUIS. I'm fine. (*Pause.*) Well, fine except that I've stuck my heroes on a boat with a hostile crew, out of sight of land somewhere in the Atlantic, and no one can sail them back to Scotland! (*They think on this dilemma a moment.*)

FANNY. But what if Alan *doesn't* kill the captain? If Hoseason *doesn't* die? (*The Captain pops back in.*)

CAPTAIN. Yes! Listen to her! Good head on her shoulders, that one!

LOUIS. Aye, I suppose...no reason he has to die...so if Alan only *wounds* the captain...

FANNY. And the lads retreat to tend him!

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LOUIS. Aye, maybe. But...oh! What if the hurt is much more grievous? Near to mortal, even?

FANNY. How does that help? Still no navigator...

LOUIS. Aye, exactly. The wounded captain makes a deal to land Alan and Davie at Loch Linnhe, and charts a course to get there, but before they make landfall, the captain dies...The sailors try to press on, but of a sudden in the night they come upon a coastal reef and founder the *Covenant*. A big shipwreck! Alan and Davie are separated! Flung apart on an unfamiliar shore!

FANNY. That's the Louis I love! *(Louis kneels in front of her and takes her hands. They touch foreheads, kiss, or otherwise show a moment of intimacy.)*

CAPTAIN. Oh, belay that! *(The Captain exits.)*

LOUIS. I dinnae mean to be cross, Fan. I mean before. You have some bonny ideas.

FANNY. And you know I like everything you write. *(A knock at the front door.)*

Oh! That's Addy for her lesson, and here's the great RLS down on the floor! I'll be chatty, give you a minute.

SCENE 2

At the door is MISS ENFIELD, punctual and professional, who wears a nurse's apron and carries a medical bag. Enfield and Fanny exchange a brief greeting, but we cannot hear it distinctly. Enfield steps inside as the conversation continues. Louis, alone in the drawing room, looks about seeking Hyde.

LOUIS. Hello? Other...Fellow? Are you...here? Hello? *(Silence.)* Aye, Louis. Talk to an empty room...perfectly sane. *(He moves to his desk. Behind him, Hyde steps out. Louis feels his presence, turns.)* There! Be thou a minister of health or goblin damned, I *will* speak with thee! Are you man, or spirit? Good, or ill?

HYDE. If I can rightly be said to be either, it is only because I am

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radically both.

FANNY. *(To Enfield.)* There must be some mistake. *(Calling out.)* Louis?
(She moves to the drawing room with Enfield following behind.)

LOUIS. *(To Hyde.)* Who are you? *(As Fanny opens the door, Hyde starts his exit.)*

FANNY. Did you pick up your medicine?

LOUIS. *(Calling after Hyde.)* No!

FANNY. You haven't?

LOUIS. *(Realizing Fanny is there.)* What?

FANNY. Have you been picking up your medicines at the chemist? *(Louis looks back for Hyde, but he is gone.)*

LOUIS. Yes, yes, of course.

FANNY. *(To Enfield.)* You see?

ENFIELD. Mister Samuels tells me otherwise.

FANNY. This is Miss Enfield, Doctor Scott's new nurse.

ENFIELD. How do you do. Can you explain then why Samuels Chemist Shop had two months of your prescriptions waiting for pickup? Mister Samuels brought them to our office, so I took the liberty of bringing them with me. *(She produces a paper bag from her medical case with a half-dozen medicine vials in it.)*

FANNY. *(To Louis.)* You keep telling me you stop by the chemist's on your walks! Why haven't you--

LOUIS. Because I don't need them! I've got an entire pharmacopeia right here! Tonics, elixirs... *(Fanny storms over to the mantel, snatches up a bottle and pours. Nothing. She glares daggers at Louis. Another bottle. Nothing.)*

FANNY. Empty! *(She hurls the bottle to the ground, shattering it on the hearth.)* Empty! *(Another smashed vial.)*

LOUIS. Fanny, stop!

ENFIELD. I'll...give you two a moment.

FANNY. You lied to me, Louis!

LOUIS. I'd hardly call--

FANNY. You said you were picking them up, and you're not! Don't you think I had enough of *Sam* lying to me? I didn't divorce him just to marry another man who--

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LOUIS. Darling, I would nev--

FANNY. Don't "darling" me! Why aren't you taking your medicines?

LOUIS. They don't even know what's bloody *wrong* with me!

FANNY. Horsefeathers! (*Calling to Enfield.*) Dorothy, Doctor Scott is aware Louis has consumption, is he not?

ENFIELD. Tuberculosis is a *potential* diagnosis, yes. It explains *many* of his sympt--

LOUIS. Then why isn't the sea air helping? What was the point of moving out from London if I'm not getting any better?

FANNY. The doctor is trying everything medical science--

LOUIS. He's throwing expensive "cures" at me willy-nilly just to line his pockets!

FANNY. Then you *take* them, Louis! You hear me? He prescribes a medicine, you take it! Do you *want* to make me a widow?

LOUIS. Fanny!

FANNY. Don't leave me, Louis.

LOUIS. I couldnae if I willed it! You may have noticed, Fanny Stevenson, I'm a wee bit mad about you... (*They share a moment as if Enfield is not in the room. Her social discomfort at their intimacy is fortunately interrupted by a knock at the front door.*)

LOUIS. Beg your pardon. I'm expecting a student.

ENFIELD. Of course. (*To Fanny.*) May we discuss his medicines? (*Enfield and Fanny move to the mantel as Louis answers the front door. REVEREND WALTER JEKYLL is revealed. Bland comfort oozes from him.*)

LOUIS. You!

REVEREND. Sorry?

LOUIS. My apologies. You looked like...someone else.

REVEREND. Ah. At any rate, good day to you, sir. I am Reverend Walter Jekyll (*note: he pronounces it GEE-kill*) of Town Centre Parish and I--

LOUIS. Jekyll? Unusual name.

REVEREND. It's Cornish. And you are Mister Stevenson?

LOUIS. Robert Louis Stevenson, aye.

REVEREND. Splendid. May I come in?

LOUIS. What's this about?

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REVEREND. Simply a social call. I understand you and Mrs. Stevenson moved here to Bournemouth over a month ago, but we've not yet seen you in church. I wanted to extend a personal--

LOUIS. The thing is, Reverend, I don't-- *(Louis is suddenly taken with a coughing fit that lasts for several seconds. From the drawing room, Fanny glances his direction, but she is stuck in conversation with Enfield, who continues.)*

ENFIELD. ...the camphorated morphine syrup. Two bottles. Take as needed for cough, but no more than two drams at a time. As well as cholorodyne for colds, and laudanum, of course, for aches and pains.

FANNY. How much does...all of this cost?

ENFIELD. *(Handing her an invoice.)* Ten pounds, four shillings. *(Fanny smiles weakly. That's an astronomical amount.)*

FANNY. Can we pay...tomorrow? Louis is expecting some funds from his publisher to be brought today.

ENFIELD. No hurry. Mister Samuels said next week will be fine. *(Out in the Blue Room, Louis has recovered. The Reverend has stepped inside.)*

REVEREND. Are you well, Robert?

LOUIS. My health is nae business of yours!

REVEREND. Of course, I didn't mean to pry. To be fair, my main concern is your eternal soul! *(The Reverend means this as a joke, but Louis isn't laughing. A young woman approaches the house from outside and stops in the open door. This is ADELAIDE, optimism in gingham.)*

ADELAIDE. Reverend Jekyll!

REVEREND. Oh! Miss Boodle, hello! What can I do for you?

ADELAIDE. Not you, actually: him.

REVEREND. You know Mister Stevenson? *(Louis gestures for Adelaide to enter.)*

LOUIS. Adelaide is my writing pupil. In fact, we have a lesson right now, so-- *(He "helps" the Reverend out.)*

REVEREND. But I'd still like to ask you--

LOUIS. Good day! *(Louis closes the door with the Reverend still talking. Enfield and Fanny emerge from the drawing room into the Blue Room.)*

FANNY. Good morning, Addy!

ADELAIDE. Good morning!

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LOUIS. *(To Enfield.)* Careful; there's a stalking ecclesiastic on the prowl!
A pious face with a grasping hand...

FANNY. Louis!

ENFIELD. I'll be on my best behavior.

LOUIS. I thank ye for coming, Miss Enfield. *(Louis extends a hand for a shake, but Enfield curtsies instead. Louis leads Adelaide into the drawing room. Enfield watches him go.)*

ENFIELD. May I ask how long he's had the rash on his hand?

FANNY. Oh, maybe a week? It comes for a while, and goes, and shows up later somewhere else.

ENFIELD. Odd.

FANNY. Louis has all kinds of mystery ailments. We've rather gotten used to it.

ENFIELD. I'm sure it's nothing serious. But I might discuss it with Doctor Scott.

FANNY. Of course. Thanks again, Miss Enfield. *(Enfield exits. Fanny exits to another part of the house. In the drawing room, Louis reclines on the chaise while Adelaide stands.)*

LOUIS. And how is *The Little Gamekeeper*?

ADELAIDE. I've given up on that story, I'm afraid. I don't know how you do it!

LOUIS. Do...?

ADELAIDE. The characters I write, they lie there wooden. Yours leap off the page.

LOUIS. Ha! *(He jumps up and shouts into the Blue Room)* You hear that, Fanny?! *(Adelaide gives him a quizzical look)* You like Jim Hawkins, yes?

ADELAIDE. Oh, he's...fine. But Long John Silver! He's so...fascinating! A polite face on the surface but underneath, so violent, primal. He feels so...

LOUIS. "True to life?"

ADELAIDE. Yes! I feel if I turned 'round quickly enough, I'd see him standing right there! How do you do that?

LOUIS. I'll tell you a secret-- *(Louis stops abruptly as a cough interrupts him. He recovers.)* He'll be stopping by any moment.

ADELAIDE. I...don't understand.

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LOUIS. He does some business for me in the city. Stops by here now and again. In fact, he should be on the afternoon train: I hear he's bringing me some treasure.

ADELAIDE. Long John...is a real person?

LOUIS. Oh, aye! Missing leg and all! Now that the book's come out, though, he cannae use the name Long John Silver in public...Now, you mustn't tell anyone, but...he goes by the moniker William Henley, claims to be a poet.

ADELAIDE. Wait. You're teasing me.

LOUIS. Aye, partly. But my friend Will Henley's real. Met him in a hospital some years back. And he does have a false left leg and he did inspire Long John, lock, stock, and barrel. That's the danger of being friends with a writer! You never know when you might turn up in a tale!

ADELAIDE. And he's coming here?

LOUIS. Indeed. Collecting some of my royalties and bringing them down from London. A piece of work, Henley is! You'll like him. One time he got in a row with Oscar Wilde over some play. Flung his crutch straight at the man's head.

ADELAIDE. Oh, no!

LOUIS. Luckily, Oscar ducked. And Henley said-- (*Another round of coughing, much more violent, takes Louis.*)

ADELAIDE. Mister Louis? (*Louis presses a handkerchief to his mouth. It comes away with a bright spot of blood. Still coughing, he staggers to the medicine bottles on the mantel. Uncorks the morphine syrup, drinks straight from the bottle.*)

LOUIS. I'm all right. Now! Remind me what your assignment was for today.

ADELAIDE. You said to think about the place I loved best, see it in my mind, and write a short description of it. No more than one hundred words.

LOUIS. A hundred words that must make the place as clear to me as it is to you.

ADELAIDE. But I'm *dreadful* at descriptions; I never even try them.

LOUIS. Well, what am I here for? Are you spending all this time and energy just to learn what you already know? It is my work to *teach* you to write, and by Heaven, I'm going to do it! Now hand it over!

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ADELAIDE. *(Reluctantly handing him a page.)* It's...my Mum's garden. *(Louis reads, nodding occasionally, sometimes making a face at a phrase he doesn't like. Adelaide waits nervously.)*

LOUIS. *(To the paper,)* No, no, no...this is disgracefully bad! It could hardly be worse-- *(A sudden cough takes him. He recovers.)* What would induce you to bring me stuff like this?

ADELAIDE. I said I couldn't do it, and you just repeated, "You must!" I knew I couldn't do it! *(Fanny enters and opens the drawing room door, plate of cookies in hand.)*

LOUIS. Well, you most certainly can't! You tried to describe everything! Every flagstone, every bush!

ADELAIDE. *(Determined not to cry.)* But that's what it looks like! I am...sorry that...my efforts were not--

LOUIS. I never in my life read a worse description, and I hope I may never read another half so bad!

FANNY. Louis! You're a brute! I told you the way you teach would kill the child--and it will!

ADELAIDE. No, it won't...I want to know *why* it's so horribly wrong. I know I should understand by now, but I don't!

LOUIS. *(to Adelaide)* That's why...I'm here to help you.

FANNY. Have a cookie, Adelaide.

ADELAIDE. Thank you. Oh! Still warm. *(Louis reaches for a cookie.)*

FANNY. *(Pulling the plate away.)* My cookies are for *nice* people.

ADELAIDE. Please...tell me how to improve. What am I doing so wrong?

LOUIS. You...litter the page with adjectives: there, there, there, there! Trying to include everything and in the end telling me nothing. Where are your descriptive verbs? Those are your true friends. If you want me to see your garden, for pity's sake, don't talk about "climbing roses in bloom." Tell me that roses twined themselves round the apple trees and fell in showers from the branches. And this! Never dare to hand me the words "green grass." I know perfectly well that grass is green! So does everybody in England, and possibly even in America... *(Louis is suddenly struck with a pain in his chest. Not a cough, something deeper. He pushes down the pain and carries on.)*

FANNY. Louis?

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LOUIS. *(Still to Adelaide.)* The world...life...shows us everything. The novelist *curates*. She selects, organizes. Pick out what makes your garden distinct from a thousand others. Tell me those things and them only. Can you do that?

ADELAIDE. I can try...No, I will.

LOUIS. That's the spirit! And while we're about it, remember once and for all that *green* is a word I forbid you to write more than, perhaps, once a lifetime.

ADELAIDE. May I...write the whole thing over again?

LOUIS. My dear Miss Boodle, half of writing is *re-writing*!

ADELAIDE. Yes. Thank you, Mister Louis.

LOUIS. *(To Fanny)* Well?

FANNY. *(Extending the cookie plate to him.)* Better.

SCENE 3

There is another knock at the front door.

FANNY. Goodness! It's like living in a train station today! *(She opens the front door to reveal boisterous, bushy-bearded William HENLEY, who moves with a crutch under his left arm. Nothing about him is small.)*

HENLEY. Afternoon, Mrs. Louis!

FANNY. Why, Mister Henley! Come in, come in. Did you have to walk all the way from the station?

HENLEY. There was a lad with a cart. *(He enters and looks about.)* 'Tis a lovely home. You've set a smart house.

FANNY. We're settling in. Louis calls the place Skerryvore, after Skerryvore Lighthouse in western Scotland. It's one of the lights Louis's uncle Alan designed.

HENLEY. Well, mariners can be grateful Louis didn't take up the family trade. He's always been rubbish with numbers and building.

FANNY. From what I'm told, his law career didn't fare much better.

HENLEY. *(With a loud but good-spirited laugh.)* We do miss him in London, though. How are you finding Bournemouth?

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FANNY. I think it's a charming little town. I've always loved the seacoast.

HENLEY. What's the Scotsman think?

FANNY. He complains that it's small and a little provincial. *(Henley laughs again.)*

HENLEY. But the new climate helps his lungs?

FANNY. Well, not...it's only been three months. The doctors say it takes time to see improvement...but how's your Hannah?

HENLEY. Oh, she's...she's fine. Lovely.

FANNY. *(Pause. There's something he's not saying.)* But...?

HENLEY. We're still trying. We thought we had...we *did* have, but it... *(He shakes his head.)*

FANNY. Oh, William, that's so hard. My condolences. But you'll get your bundle of joy in due time. I know it.

HENLEY. Very kind. Anyway, how is your son...um...

FANNY. Lloyd.

HENLEY. Lloyd! Right. How old is he getting to be?

FANNY. Seventeen.

HENLEY. No! Likely grown a foot since I saw him. Is he home?

FANNY. Oh, he's...in Edinburgh, with Louis's parents. Lloyd wants to go to university there.

HENLEY. Isn't he too young to--

FANNY. *Next* fall. When he's eighteen.

HENLEY. Then why is he not...

FANNY. He's...um...a distraction for Louis.

HENLEY. A *distraction*?

FANNY. You know how boys can be, running around, always hammering something together outside the window at strange times, barging into the room when Louis is working--

HENLEY. Oh, I'm going to give that Scotsman a piece of my--

FANNY. No, please don't make a fuss.

HENLEY. He called a child a distraction! What could he possibly be working on that's so much more important?

FANNY. A novel. Another boy's adventure, this time in Scotland. He seems lost in it. He's toiled at it all summer.

HENLEY. I'll talk with him. We editors have a way of reacquainting

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authors with reality.

FANNY. Oh, thank you. Are you staying here tonight?

HENLEY. Ah...in Bournemouth, at least. I had thought the hotel--

FANNY. Nonsense! I'll make up a room for you upstairs.

HENLEY. Oh, I don't want to be any trouble--

FANNY. This isn't a democracy, Mister Henley. Besides, I wouldn't wish the Excelsior on anyone! And I greatly appreciate whatever you can do for my husband. *(She leads Henley to the drawing room.)* Louis, William is--

ADELAIDE. *(With a mouth full of cookie.)* Long John Silver!

HENLEY. Beg pardon?

ADELAIDE. Oh! I...I didn't mean--

LOUIS. *(Laughing.)* In the flesh, Addy. *(To Henley.)* Will, this is Miss Adelaide Boodle, our neighbor and my writing pupil. Addy, this is my dear friend and poet William Henley.

HENLEY. Miss Boodle.

ADELAIDE. Pleasure to meet you! I've heard so much about you.

HENLEY. Well, that's unsettling!

ADELAIDE. No, it's not bad, it just-- *(Henley laughs good-naturedly.)*

LOUIS. 'Til next week then, Addy?

FANNY. Take the cookies with you. Bring the plate back next time.

ADELAIDE. Thank you. Nice to meet you, Mister Henley. *(Adelaide leaves the drawing room, cookies in hand. Fanny closes the drawing room door and follows Adelaide to the front door. They embrace briefly, then Adelaide leaves and Fanny exits to another part of the house.)*

LOUIS. You don't know, Will, how I've been waiting for you to come down. The bank's been sending letters, the butcher's been lingering 'round the back gate...

HENLEY. You're low on money?

LOUIS. "Low" would imply I had some to measure. Please tell me you brought me a fat stack of banknotes.

HENLEY. We'll get to that. Did you really send your son away?

LOUIS. Stepson. Lloyd's my stepson.

HENLEY. What in God's name you do that for?

LOUIS. Honestly, he was a— *(The end of Henley's crutch is suddenly inches from Louis's nose.)*

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HENLEY. Say “distraction.” I dare you.

LOUIS. No, it’s not...what’s got into you? (*The crutch lowers.*) The amount of chaos he...do you have any idea how hard it is to write with children about?

HENLEY. (*Pause.*) No. As a matter of fact, I do *not*.

LOUIS. Ah, my trouble’s are nae fault of his. He’s a good lad. And my Da did want to spent more time with him, hoping at least a *grandson* would follow in the footsteps of the great Stevenson engineers...not turn out a disappointment like a *writer*.

HENLEY. Fanny said you’d been working on something?

LOUIS. Ugh. On my desk. (*Henley moves to the standing desk and picks up a page covered with writing.*)

HENLEY. (*Reading.*) “Memoirs of the Adventures of David Balfour in the Year 1751: How he was Kidnapped and Cast away; his Sufferings in a Desert Isle; His Journey in the Wild Highlands; his acquaintance with Alan Breck Stewart and other notorious Highland Jacobites; with all that he suffered at the hands of his Uncle, Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws, falsely so-called: Written by Himself and now set forth by Robert Louis Stevenson.”

LOUIS. (*Pause.*) It’s a working title.

HENLEY. How big do you imagine book spines to be?

LOUIS. Or I thought, “*The Lad With the Silver Buttons.*”

HENLEY. Another boys’ adventure?

LOUIS. Mm-hmm.

HENLEY. What about: “*Kidnapped.*”

LOUIS. Ah, that’s bonny fine! *Kidnapped.* You’re always so good with the titles. I was hoping to sell it as a serial, maybe to Young Folk’s Magazine again.

HENLEY. You’re close on done with it? (*Louis makes a noncommittal sound.*) You do have it all plotted out? (*Another “not really” sound.*) How many chapters do you have?

LOUIS. Four. But I’ve burned at least a dozen. I cannae get it to work. I asked Fanny for advice, but--

HENLEY. *Fanny?* How would that be helpful?

LOUIS. I thought that her opinion might be--

HENLEY. She’s a *housewife*, Lou.

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LOUIS. Housewives read my books.

HENLEY. *Read* them, yes. Not *critique* them.

LOUIS. She also writes...

HENLEY. I'm surprised she can *read*, given the American educational system!

LOUIS. She published three short stories this summer!

HENLEY. In a collection with *you* as co-author. Look, I'm not saying a layman's...laywoman's?...opinion isn't worth considering, but Fanny's an *amateur*. She's not *literate*. Not in the sense of having a fundamental understanding of literature and what is required to create it.

LOUIS. Maybe I don't either.

HENLEY. What's going on with you? I've never seen you blocked before.

LOUIS. Not blocked, just...adrift. The Little People have lost their direction.

HENLEY. The...Little People?

LOUIS. Aye, the Brownies! In the Little Theatre in my head.

HENLEY. Sorry, that's my trick ear. Did you just say you had Brownies in your head?

LOUIS. Aye! They put on plays for me, act out characters in my dreams, my imagination. And all I do is write it down!

HENLEY. Convenient...and at least you don't have to pay royalties!

LOUIS. *ROYALTIES!*

HENLEY. Good God, man, you gave me a start!

LOUIS. Did you stop by Longman, Green & Co. like I asked?

HENLEY. Aye, I did... (*He pulls out a few bank-notes and gives them to Louis.*)

LOUIS. Where's the rest of it? (*There is no more.*) Fifteen bloody pounds?

HENLEY. Mostly from *A Child's Garden of Verses*.

LOUIS. What about *Prince Otto*?

HENLEY. T'isn't moving. Barely sold a thousand copies in nine months.

LOUIS. 'Twas the hardest thing I've ever written! (*Fanny comes back in, holding the medical bill, and heads for the drawing room. She has now put on shoes.*)

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HENLEY. Critics don't know what to make of it: is a romance? A farce? A fantasy?

LOUIS. Critics! Do you know, one review said it was "on the threshold of Gilbertian comedy." Imagine comparing *Prince Otto* to *Pirates of bloody Penzance!*

FANNY. (*Opening the drawing room door.*) Louis, I forgot to mention Miss Enfield left a bill from the pharmacy.

LOUIS. How much?

FANNY. Ten pounds four...

LOUIS. A trifle! Not to worry! Here, take fifteen and keep the rest for pin money.

(*Louis hands the banknotes to Fanny, who smiles and exits back into the house.*)

HENLEY. She doesn't know.

LOUIS. No.

HENLEY. Dangerous gambit, that.

LOUIS. Does Hannah know *your* finances? I cannae tell her we're broke.

HENLEY. That dire, is it?

LOUIS. We've been eking out a pauper's living. I'm supposed to provide for us... (*He gestures to the medicines.*) ...and I'm literally *drinking* five pounds a month to stay alive! Lately, I've been trying to go without to save a few shillings.

HENLEY. But surely *Treasure Island* is bringing in--

LOUIS. It's down to dribs and drabs. And getting extra money from Charles Longman is blood from a stone.

HENLEY. Aye...though I did convince him to give you this. (*He smiles and pulls out a paper that he gives to Louis.*)

LOUIS. A hundred-pound cheque! Did they reprint something, or...

HENLEY. It's an advance. On your new book!

LOUIS. What new book?

HENLEY. Longman wants a ghost story. Something Gothic like *The Body Snatcher* you did for the *Pall Mall Gazette* last Christmas.

LOUIS. They'd pay me this much for a short story?

HENLEY. They're looking for something a bit longer. Somewhere... twenty-five, thirty-thousand words. What the Americans might call a

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“dime novel.”

LOUIS. A shilling shocker? Are you mad? Literary trash! They’re all formula, no craft!

HENLEY. So yours will be better! Maybe you can use some of what you’ve been working on already.

LOUIS. *Kidnapped’s* not a Gothic thriller! It’s swords and muskets in the Scottish Highlands!

HENLEY. For Heaven’s sakes! Throw in a lonely manor house, a ghost in the attic, some dark magic--

LOUIS. Put magic in the Jacobite bloody revolution? (*A stifled cough. A sudden chest pain, which Louis hides.*) But tell Longman’s I’ll get them something soon. And thank you, Will: this cheque’ll keep me afloat until-- (*He notices something on the cheque.*) This is dated November first! I can’t even cash this for a fortnight! (*Silence.*) Will?

HENLEY. That’s the only...catch. I had to promise Longman’s you’d get them a proof by All Saints’ Day.

LOUIS. (*Starting up.*) By All Saints’--? (*Louis is seized by a coughing fit, accompanied by more chest pain. Henley is unsure what to do. Louis’s voice is a croak.*) Are you out of your bloody mind? You promised them I’d write an entire novel in eleven days?

HENLEY. You always have three or four different projects going! I figured you’d have *something* would work. But if you can’t, you can’t. I’ll just tell them--

LOUIS. It’s a hundred pounds! I need this money, Will! Couldn’t we ask Charles for more time?

HENLEY. November first was the only way he’d agree. Christmas deadlines and such. Then his print schedule’s full ‘til after the new year.

LOUIS. (*Silence. The dilemma sits. Louis decides.*) Wire Longman’s. Tell Charles he’ll have his book. A Gothic shilling-shocker.

HENLEY. Louis, it’s the twenty-first of October! You can’t hope to begin and finish an entire--

LOUIS. I dinnae have a choice, Will! Writing’s all I’m good for. I don’t dig ditches or build furniture! (*He paces.*) It’s nae so bad...thirty thousand words in...eleven days...in a genre I’ve never-- (*A pain stops him.*)

...characters I given nae thought about...and a setting...oh, God...I need...a

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setting-- (*Louis collapses. Tries to get up, but his legs won't work. Blood on his lips. Incoherence.*)

HENLEY. (*Rushing to him.*) Louis! (*Louis is unresponsive.*) Fanny!
Fanny, come quick!

FANNY. (*Running in through the Blue Room and to LOUIS's side.*) Some water! (*A cup is held to his lips. A choking swallow. Then a WELTER OF BLOOD vomits forth. Both FANNY and HENLEY react with a cry.*)

LOUIS. (*Looking up with a ghastly red smile.*) Seems Bloody Jack is back.

FANNY. Don't talk, darling. Will, let's get him on his feet. (*They raise him to tenuous verticality.*)

HENLEY. Upstairs?

FANNY. Aye, to the--

LOUIS. No! I cannae--Fanny, please! (*They stop. Louis continues in a ragged voice.*) The thought of dying in bed... I want to die like a...human being, on my feet. I want to die in my clothes, to fall just as--.

HENLEY. Shut it! You're not bloody dying! The couch, Fanny. (*They maneuver Louis onto the chaise and make him as comfortable as possible.*) Does he have a doctor in town?

FANNY. Doctor Scott.

LOUIS. Katharine...and Charles...

HENLEY. What about them? You want them here? (*Louis nods weakly.*) Run into town and fetch the doctor, then wire his cousin Kat and Charlie Baxter. Go! I'll watch him 'til you're back.

FANNY. I...I don't even know what to say. In the telegram.

HENLEY. Just say, "RLS gravely ill. Come immediately." They'll drop everything. (*Fanny nods.*) And tell your doctor...hurry. (*Fanny hurries out.*)

ENTR'ACTE 1

It is three days later. Henley has exited. Louis still lies under blankets on the chaise. Fanny has taken off her apron and her hair is falling down, but she wears the same dress; one gets the impression she has slept in it and barely left Louis's side. The doorbell rings. The caller is Miss ENFIELD.

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FANNY. Miss Enfield. Please, come in.

ENFIELD. How is Mister Stevenson?

FANNY. (*Looking outside.*) Are you...alone?

ENFIELD. Yes. The doctor was called away urgently.

FANNY. And Louis *isn't* urgent?

ENFIELD. Mrs. Cantwell's baby decided this was the morning to arrive...two or three weeks early. Ergo: you get me. Has there been any change since the doctor saw your husband?

FANNY. The first two days, no. He was...barely coherent, coughing, still spitting up. I caught so much blood...never seen so much. And his fever seemed to be burning him alive. This morning, though, the fever broke and he seemed to revive a little, but he said that his chest hurt him grievously.

ENFIELD. That I can relieve. We'll bathe his chest with a solution of cocaine.

FANNY. Is that a...pain-killer?

ENFIELD. Cocaine? Yes. Fairly new, quite revolutionary. The Medical Association is just agog over it.

FANNY. Wonderful.

ENFIELD. It is good to live in the modern age. Shall we see him?

FANNY. Miss Enfield, these...episodes. Is this what we can begin to expect as his consumption progresses?

ENFIELD. Doctor Scott is beginning to doubt if Mister Stevenson has tuberculosis at all.

FANNY. That's ridiculous; of course he does. He's been coughing blood for years.

ENFIELD. There are other diseases that can cause hemorrhages of the lung. But many of the symptoms that Mister Stevenson exhibits are not consistent with tuberculosis. The fevers, the rashes.

FANNY. Then what does the doctor think it is?

ENFIELD. (*Pause.*) That is...the other reason Dr. Scott sent *me*, so I could speak to you, woman to woman. It is possible that Mister Stevenson has...the gentleman's disease.

FANNY. (*Taken aback.*) That's...that's not possible. He's only been with...I'm the only...you're certain of this?

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ENFIELD. It fits all the signs, but the doctor would like to conduct more observations and testing to be sure.

FANNY. Then let's not broach the subject just yet. Until you're sure. Or he recovers.

ENFIELD. As you like. Have *you* noticed any symptoms?

FANNY. I'm...not trained in medicine. Louis has many ailments...

ENFIELD. I meant on yourself. Rashes, irritation, for example?

FANNY. Oh! Oh my. Not...yet?

ENFIELD. Good. Please monitor yourself.

FANNY. If I...if *he*...is there anything you can do?

ENFIELD. Unfortunately, this...condition...is not curable even by modern science. Though I have brought a medicine that should suppress many of the symptoms. *(Fanny and Enfield move into the drawing room. Fanny pulls back the blankets to reveal Louis, asleep. She strokes his hair to wake him.)*

FANNY. Louis? Louis, the nurse is here—

LOUIS. *(Awaking with a start, nearly shouting.)* A setting as bleak as the blasted heath--!

FANNY. Louis, it's me! It's me, darling. And the nurse, Miss Enfield.

LOUIS. *(A little foggy.)* Enfield... *(He sinks down and clutches his chest.)*
Oww...

ENFIELD. I'm just going to bathe your chest, Mister Stevenson. A nice cool cloth. *(Louis pushes back the blankets and Fanny unbuttons his shirt. Enfield pours medicine onto a cloth and bathes his chest. There is a knock at the door. Fanny opens it to reveal Charles BAXTER, florid and mutton-chopped. He holds a bottle of whiskey, tied with a bow, which he cradles like an old friend.)*

BAXTER. Salutations, Fanny darling!

FANNY. Mister Baxter! Thank you so much for coming!

BAXTER. How is our sickly Highlander?

FANNY. The nurse is with him now. Trying to get him to take medicine.

BAXTER. *(Holding up the bottle.)* Fortunately, I have pharmaceuticals to hand!

FANNY. No! He can't be drinking!

BAXTER. This is Glenlivet. To the Scots, this *IS* medicine!

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FANNY. Absolutely not.

BAXTER. But it's a fifteen-year... *(She is unwavering.)* I suppose our tippie can be granted a continuance for now. *(Fanny leads Baxter to the drawing room. As he approaches the door, Enfield looks up.)*

ENFIELD. Stop! *(She moves to him.)* Show me your handkerchief.

BAXTER. Beg pardon?

ENFIELD. *(Holding out a hand.)* Handkerchief. *(Nonplussed, Baxter pulls out a folded handkerchief and hands it to her. She opens and examines it: clean, not used.)*

FANNY. What...are you looking for?

ENFIELD. When anyone new enters the sick room, I want you to check their handkerchief. If there is evidence they've blown their nose or coughed into it, they must not be allowed in. *(To Baxter.)* You seem to be fine, Mister—

BAXTER. Charles Baxter, Attorney at Law.

LOUIS. *(Weakly.)* Hello, Charlie. Bonny to see you.

BAXTER. Pardon, sir, have you seen my friend Louis Stevenson? I regard nothing here but an animated bundle of shawls and wraps! *(Louis laughs despite himself. The laugh turns to a cough.)*

ENFIELD. Please have a care not to excite the patient too much. Or allow him to talk excessively.

BAXTER. Have you *met* him?

LOUIS. *(To Baxter.)* You brought medicine. *(Baxter laughs; Enfield doesn't understand. Fanny points at the bottle.)*

ENFIELD. Unfortunately, Mister Stevenson, medical science does not prescribe whiskey to better your condition. However, you are to take this, morning and evening—*(She holds up a vial.)* Ergotine. It's in convenient soluble disc form. Crumble one into a powder, dissolve in water, and drink it all at once.

LOUIS. No.

FANNY. What do you mean, "no?"

LOUIS. What's the point? Her new chemist's powder—and all the tinctures and concoctions and potions on the mantel there—they none of 'em can do the single thing I truly need: to draw out the sickly, weak, febrile, and ailing parts a'lurking inside me and leave what's left hale an' healthy. Give

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me that, mix that up in your minim glass, and I'll drink it down straightaway. *(He collapses back, spent after that sustained effort.)*

ENFIELD. *(After a pause.)* Ergotine is Doctor Scott's prescription, Mister Stevenson. Ignore it at your peril.

FANNY. I'll put it here for him. He'll take it. *(Louis throws the blanket over his head.)* He'll take it.

ENFIELD. *(Packing her things.)* See what you can do. May I ask what he has been eating of late?

FANNY. Come to the kitchen. I can show you as easy as tell. *(Fanny and Enfield move out of the drawing room and exit to another part of the house.)*

BAXTER. When did Robert Louis Stevenson, Esquire become Mister Hide-Under-the-Blankets-From-Women?

LOUIS. When he's about to die.

BAXTER. Don't be melodramatic.

LOUIS. *(Emerging.)* I'm sick, Charlie. Sick to death.

BAXTER. Ah, you've been rife with illness your entire life. Even before we were schoolboys at university. And since when do you refuse medicine?

LOUIS. Since it's not bloody worth it! Look at me! It demands a chemist's shop every month just to keep me breathing. A sickbed's not a life for a man, or a marriage for Fanny. I should just get on with dying and—how did Dickens put it—“decrease the surplus population.”

BAXTER. Don't be ridiculous. I'm sure we could find a workhouse that would take you. *(Louis goes back under the blanket. There is a knock at the front door. Fanny and Enfield enter back into the Blue Room.)*

ENFIELD. Send for me if you need me.

FANNY. I shall...oh! *(Fanny opens the front door. The Reverend is there, with a small valise.)*

REVEREND. Good afternoon, Mrs. Stevenson, Miss Enfield!

ENFIELD. Reverend. *(To Fanny.)* Handkerchief. *(Enfield exits.)*

REVEREND. *(Confused.)* I'm sorry...did you need a handkerchief, or...? *(He offers his. Fanny snatches it from his hand and holds it up, examining it closely.)*

REVEREND. Must be an American custom... *(Satisfied, Fanny gives it*

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back.)

FANNY. What did you want? Reverend.

REVEREND. I heard Mister Stevenson had taken ill, and I thought to Anoint the Sick...unless he...?

FANNY. He's still with us...

REVEREND. Thanks be to God. May I see him? *(Fanny points to the drawing room, and the Reverend proceeds and knocks lightly on the door. Fanny exits to another part of the house. The Reverend still stands knocking. Finally, Baxter gets up.)*

BAXTER. It's your own house, Fanny, why the devil are you—*(He yanks the door open.)* Good God, it's a vicar!

REVEREND. Um...yes. Walter Jekyll. And you are?

BAXTER. Charles Baxter, esquire.

REVEREND. Pleasure. *(Louder, to Louis.)* Mister Stevenson: it's Reverend Jekyll. How are you? *(Louis's head emerges from the covers. He says nothing, just glares. Coughs.)* I'm here today, Mister Stevenson...may I call you Robert?

BAXTER. Oh yes, he loves that.

REVEREND. *(To Louis.)* That is your Christian name, is it not?

LOUIS. Only if Robert was pronounced 'Jesus.' *(Baxter laughs.)*

REVEREND. I...see. I heard you were ill, Mister Stevenson, and I am here to administer Extreme Unction—

BAXTER. Last rites? Have some tact, man! Good God!

REVEREND. Sir! It is not just for the...dying. I pray he will recover. But we administer the Sacrament to show our submission to the will of God.

LOUIS. I chose to not submit. Long ago.

REVEREND. I'm sorry?

BAXTER. He doesn't believe in your God, Reverend. Or any god for that matter.

REVEREND. Doubts...are natural. In the gospel of Mark we read of a man who tells Jesus "I believe; help my unbelief."

LOUIS. Oh, I'm not asking for help. I disbelieve just fine on my own.

REVEREND. *(Scandalized.)* Sir!

LOUIS. L-J-R... *(Louis reaches out for the whiskey bottle. Baxter twists out the cork and Louis takes a swig, staring down the Reverend the whole*

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time.)

REVEREND. What is...L-J-R?

BAXTER. *(Baxter crosses to the mantel, inspects the bottles and dosing cups, and selects a minim glass. He blows it out and pours himself a shot.)*

Club we founded back in our law school days back in Edinburgh. L-J-R: Liberty, Justice, Reverence.

REVEREND. Ah, well! Reverence is a—

BAXTER. Reverence to one motto and to one only... *(He raises the glass.)* “Disregard everything our parents ever taught us.” *(He drinks the shot. Louis laughs, coughs. An awkward pause.)*

REVEREND. *(To Louis.)* Are...you saying you no longer believe in the Christian faith?

LOUIS. I’m saying I grew tired of pretending to be something I was not.

REVEREND. I see.

BAXTER. Put his parents in a fine fettle when he told them, some years back.

LOUIS. My father actually said, “You have rendered my whole life a failure.”

REVEREND. When a child errs, a parent seeks only what is best—

LOUIS. I was twenty-two. What were my faults? My defects? *(Louis flings off the blankets and lurches to his feet.)*

BAXTER. Louis, perhaps you’d—

LOUIS. High-spiritedness. Impatience. A mind that questioned. Natural traits. Even well-intentioned ones. Yet my father’s simplistic dogma could not square who I was with his holy book—*(His coughs begin anew.)*—his religion would have me hide that part of myself, deny it, hate myself for having it.

BAXTER. Reverend, perhaps coming back when he’s feeling more himself—

REVEREND. I do not fear good theological debate! *(To Louis.)* The truth your father knows—and the Scriptures teach—is that two natures are at war within every human heart. One good, one evil.

LOUIS. Are even the clergy so divided?

REVEREND. Indeed! We are tempted, just as other men, but we are called to shun our sinful natures, restrain our base urges, and strive to be

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the men the Lord made us to be.

LOUIS. What tempts you, Mister Jekyll?

REVEREND. Sorry?

LOUIS. What does your evil nature prompt you to do?

REVEREND. I...I don't--

LOUIS. "I am myself indifferent honest, but yet I could accuse me of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me."

BAXTER. Louis, put down the Shakespeare and walk away--

LOUIS. What does *he* want? The dark, twisted thing hiding inside Walter Jekyll, doctor of theology--what crimes would he commit, what base pleasures would he give himself to--

REVEREND. Sir!

LOUIS. --if not bound by the strictures of polite society? Show me him! Show me that man! *(The lights change. It seems as though only Louis and the Reverend are in the room, but the clergyman seems transformed into something else: HYDE.)*

HYDE. "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes."

LOUIS. You.

HYDE. Remember, Stevenson, I come at your insistence.

LOUIS. But who are you? You're not one of my characters...

HYDE. Perhaps not yet, but we're old friends, you and I.

LOUIS. Prove it.

HYDE. I followed you down Clyde Street; your tongue aching for what you could not taste. Through the lamp-dark square down to Leith Street; the row of shops selling tobacco and lust.

LOUIS. *(Rattled.)* That was...years ago.

HYDE. I know you of old, Louis Stevenson. You kept me smothered in the days of childhood when you walked with your mother's hand. Caged me through the catechisms and classes to please your father; I was your shadow in the dark streets of Edinburgh and I've grown like a strangling vine in the garden of your mind. I know what your soul craves in its most secret places.

LOUIS. I...I think you should leave.

HYDE. If I go, I leave you as you are, neither richer nor wiser. Or...a new

SEEKING MISTER HYDE

province of knowledge can be laid open to you. A story to bring new heights of fame and wealth.

LOUIS. What kind of story?

HYDE. Of hidden natures. Of transformations.

LOUIS. Transformations of what?

HYDE. Say rather of whom. *(Hyde touches Louis's temple, and Louis suddenly stares into the void, transfixed by a scene we cannot see. Hyde speaks in his ear, quickly and directly, almost as a mesmerist speaks to a patient.)* A deserted boulevard in the cool of the night. Cobblestones gleam darkly in the damp under a canopy of piercing stars. A darkened building, a monolith of brick and limestone. Observe: a row of three windows on the second story, the middle one glowing with gaslight, and there, framed in the aperture...

LOUIS. A man.

HYDE. More or less.

LOUIS. Respectable. A gentleman.

HYDE. A paragon of society. And then...before your eyes...

LOUIS. *(Louis sees the scene in his mind and is suddenly horrified by what he witnesses.)* Oh, God!

HYDE. TRANSFORMATION! *(With this last forceful word, the lights return as they were, and Hyde melts into the Reverend again. Louis staggers back, his strength failing.)*

LOUIS. *(Fading to unconsciousness.)* "We are errant knaves all..." *(He falls back on the chaise.)*

BAXTER. Louis!

REVEREND. Mister Stevenson! *(Baxter and the Reverend try to catch Louis as darkness falls on the scene.)*

END OF ACT I

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ACT II SCENE 1

Some time later. The Reverend is gone. Reading in a chair in the Blue Room is KATHARINE. Once a lovely but reserved teen, two decades of life's abrasions have burnished her into a confident but world-weary beauty. Henley and Baxter wait with her. In the drawing room, Fanny stands beside Louis, who lies motionless on the chaise. After a moment, she softly exits and joins her guests.

FANNY. He's gone back asleep. Drifts in and out.

BAXTER. How long must we tarry for him to wake? *(Katharine makes a noise of shock.)* Not all of us have the luxury of unlimited days away from London, is my point.

HENLEY. At least Katharine thought to bring a book.

FANNY. What are you reading, Katharine?

KATHARINE. *La Comedie Humaine* by Honore Balzac. Specifically *Memoires de Deux Jeunes Mariées*. Are you familiar?

FANNY. You read French!

KATHARINE. Aye. Don't you?

FANNY. Not...well. I tried to learn when I was in Paris, but luckily my art teacher spoke English.

KATHARINE. You know French, William, don't you?

HENLEY. I was laid up in a Paris hospital for a year when they took my foot. Had to learn it to be able to read and keep my sanity. And to flirt with the nurses...

KATHARINE. Charles?

BAXTER. Hmm?

KATHARINE. French.

BAXTER. What about it? Learned it way back in law school under Victor Richon. *(There is a knock on the front door. Fanny opens it to reveal Adelaide, who carries a packet of letters and papers.)*

FANNY. Addy! Come in, come in.

HENLEY. *(In a "pirate" voice.)* Shiver me timbers, it be Jim Hawkins!

ADELAIDE. Hello, Mister Henley. *(Quietly, to Fanny.)* I didn't realize

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you had more guests...

FANNY. Louis asked for them. May I introduce Katharine de Mattos--

KATHARINE. *Stevenson* de Mattos, his cousin from Edinburgh.

Delighted to meet you.

ADELAIDE. Likewise.

FANNY. And Mister Charles Baxter, from Louis's law school days.

BAXTER. On the precious few days he actually went to class.

FANNY. This is our neighbor and Louis's writing student, Adelaide Boodle.

ADELAIDE. Addy.

KATHARINE. A writer?

ADELAIDE. Trying. Trying to be.

HENLEY. Aren't we all! Katharine writes, Fanny writes, even Baxter scrawls things that aren't legal briefs once in a while.

FANNY. And Mister Henley's a poet.

HENLEY. I suppose. Hard to earn the King's silver with rhymes, though.

BAXTER. Because you write depressing ones. Lewis Carroll does pretty well for himself.

ADELAIDE. I'm not published yet, or anything.

HENLEY. My dear, after spending the better part of my life in the pursuit of the literary muse, I found my own creative scribbling so utterly unmarketable that I had to admit myself beaten and throw myself into journalism!

KATHARINE. Imagine the degradation...

ADELAIDE. Oh! Miss Fanny, I brought the post. What are all these red envelopes?

FANNY. *(They are bills from creditors, and Fanny knows it. She snatches them away.)* Oh, those are...it's nothing. A few bills to tend to. Thank you for fetching the mail, my dear. *(Offering a paper.)* We do get the *Pall Mall Gazette* if anyone needs reading material...

HENLEY. I'd take it! Was hoping to not miss Stead's next article! Anyone else following *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon*? *(Blank looks answer him.)*

KATHARINE. I don't know what that--

HENLEY. *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon!*

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KATHARINE. When will the English learn that repeatedly shouting a phrase at someone does not add to its clarity?

BAXTER. Henley means a portfolio of articles they've been running about London's brothels.

FANNY. Oh! I think those places of ill repute should be made illegal and their patrons locked up!

BAXTER. Such houses serve an inevitable--albeit unfortunate--societal function. And a certain percentage of women throughout history have always chosen such professions.

HENLEY. But the *Gazette's* point is that many of them *aren't* choosing it. They're being duped, sometimes drugged. Many of them get sold to the madams by their parents.

FANNY. Their *parents*?

HENLEY. They're young girls, many of them!

FANNY. How young?

HENLEY. Thirteen, fourteen...

ADELAIDE. That's horrible!

KATHARINE. Poverty is horrible. It can make unspeakable decisions seem the only course of action.

HENLEY. Will Stead, the editor, he's been proving the brothels lit'rally buy 'em by the head, these girls, and have doctors certify their vir--
(*Clears his throat.*) That they've never...been with a man. The madams get a premium for that.

FANNY. There should be laws! At that age!

BAXTER. Thirteen is the age of legal consent. And they are compensated.

KATHARINE. Compensated? For being seduced at thirteen? Charles!

FANNY. What possesses human beings to be such monsters to one another?

BAXTER. It's simply capitalism. Supply and demand. Market forces.

KATHARINE. No, Charles. Market forces influence a textile mill to weave linen instead of wool. The market does not move men to demand thirteen-year-old children to satisfy their lust!

BAXTER. The majority of the patrons of those establishments do not lean to such proclivities! Most are quite respectable gentlemen!

FANNY. Respectable! I should shun any man who frequents such--

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BAXTER. I simply point out this is a *moral* issue, not a legal one. It is not for the law to regulate--

HENLEY. (*Overlapping.*) How can abduction of children not be a matter for the law?

BAXTER. (*Overlapping.*) --the relations between consenting parties, and the laws also allow certain women the opportunity to--

HENLEY. (*Overlapping, now shouting.*) The law is an ass! (*Realizing everyone is staring.*) Sorry. Just...quoting Dickens. (*An awkward silence.*)

KATHARINE. Fanny, did you want me to brew up a spot of tea? I know...us Brits and our tea...

FANNY. Tea. Yes, of course. Addy, will you help her? I'm going to check on Louis. (*Katharine and Adelaide exit. Fanny enters the drawing room. The Blue Room falls silent.*)

SCENE 2

In the drawing room, Louis sleeps. Fanny enters, sighs at the state of the room, tidies up here and there. Louis moans sharply and stirs.

FANNY. Louis? (*But he is still again. Fanny checks on him, brushes hair off his face. No response. More straightening around the room.*)

LOUIS. (*Barely articulate.*) ...but a glimpse...the window...thrust down...

FANNY. What was that, darling?

LOUIS. (*Louis, though still asleep, thrashes as if wrestling with an unseen foe. He grunts and cries out in exertion or pain.*) God forgive us!

Forgive...I can't...

FANNY. (*Running to him.*) Louis! Wake up! Wake up!

LOUIS. (*Coming to his senses with a gasp.*) Why did you wake me? I was dreaming a fine bogey tale!

FANNY. It was a nightmare, darling. Just a dream. (*Louis stirs. He forces himself to stand and pulls a shawl around his shoulders.*)

LOUIS. Paper...

FANNY. Writing? Now? Louis you've been incoherent for almost --

LOUIS. I need a book by All Saints' Day.

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FANNY. Darling, you're not making sense.

LOUIS. *(In his own world.)* Eleven days...it can't be done. *(He looks groggily at the manuscript for Kidnapped.)* But what? Not David bloody Balfour... *(He pushes things around on his desk, searching blearily for something.)*

FANNY. You're not well, love!

LOUIS. *Get out! Leave me be. I need paper! (Fanny leaves the drawing room. A cruel laugh echoes from everywhere, nowhere.)* Hello? Are you here? *(But he is alone. A pain strikes his chest. He nearly passes out, then slowly recovers, but his breath is ragged. He staggers over to the mantel and considers the bottle of new medicine, the ergotine that Enfield left. Then, aping Nurse Enfield.)* "Doctor Scott's prescription, Mister Stevenson. Ignore it at your peril." *(Another brief pain. He decides. He selects a minim glass and blows into it to clear whatever dust lays inside. Opens the bottle and extracts a small disk of compressed ergotine, which goes into the glass. Then some water from a pitcher, entering the minim glass clear but changing to a greenish color as the medicine dissolves. He swirls the liquid around in the glass, peering at it like a chemist observing an experiment. He drinks. The medicine's taste is foul and causes him to cough. He totters back to sit heavily on the chaise.)*

HYDE. *(Emerging from the wall.)* School's in session, love. Ready to learn?

LOUIS. Not 'til you answer me: who are you?

HYDE. Who am I? I am the cold thrill of terror. The lust of evil gratified. The love of life screwed to the topmost peg.

LOUIS. That's not a proper introduction.

HYDE. Oh, we're being proper now?

LOUIS. A name.

HYDE. Mmm, that's *your* department. You're the author.

LOUIS. Fine, Mister...Mister...Mystery...Mister E! E for, for...Edward, I think. So, Edward...Edward something. But nothing prosaic, nothing...normal. No, not for you. No Bracegirdle or Potter or Throgmorton. Mister...Dread. Mister Shadow. Mister...Hyde. Edward Hyde.

HYDE. At your service.

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LOUIS. Oh, you and I, friend...we're going to do great things together. If Charles Longman wants a bogey tale, he shall have it!

SCENE 3

The lights shift to the Blue Room. Charles sits. Katharine enters with tea. Henley stands speaking to Fanny. Louis opens the door from the drawing room, quickly and forcefully. He is filled with an energy and vitality that we have not seen.

BAXTER. Louis!

FANNY. I told them you shouldn't be up!

LOUIS. I took the new medicine, Fan. It's all right.

HENLEY. All right? We thought you half in the grave, man!

BAXTER. *(To the others.)* I told you we had nothing to worry about!

LOUIS. You might not, but I have a most pressing concern, thanks to Mister Henley.

HENLEY. Me?

LOUIS. Will has thrown down a gauntlet: Charles Longman will publish my next novel if I can get it to him in eleven days.

FANNY. Eleven days!

HENLEY. Louis, about that...

BAXTER. Eleven days...that's no trick.

KATHARINE. What?

BAXTER. It's a scant two hours to London in a train carriage. Give me the manuscript and I'll deliver it as soon as I arrive!

LOUIS. Therein lies the challenge. I can't give it to you until I write it first.

BAXTER. Oh. Oh yes, that is much harder.

KATHARINE. You cannot expect to write a book in eleven--

HENLEY. Louis!

LOUIS. Eh?

HENLEY. You don't *have* eleven days.

LOUIS. But you told me--

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HENLEY. Aye, and you've been out cold for three of them. It's the twenty-third, man!

LOUIS. So...eight days?

FANNY. Louis! You're barely back on your feet. Go lie down.

HENLEY. Fanny's...I think she's right, Lou. You can't push yourself in this state, or you'll lose what little--

LOUIS. Better to lose health like a spendthrift than waste it like a miser! Better to live and be done with it than die a bit each day in the sickroom.

BAXTER. I recommend you try not dying at all...

FANNY. *(Everyone but Fanny laughs at that. She moves closer to Louis.)* It's too much, too soon...you'll make yourself even worse.

LOUIS. Yes. Yes, I know. I probably shall. But you cannot run away from a weakness. Sometimes you must fight it out or perish.

FANNY. I don't want you to perish! The very thought...terrifies.

LOUIS. To steal a stanza or two from Will there: "Beyond this place of wrath and tears / Looms but the Horror of the shade, / And yet the menace of the years / Finds and shall find me unafraid. / It matters not how strait the gate, / How fraught with punishment the scroll..." *(Louis looks to Henley.)*

HENLEY. "I am the master of my fate, / I am the captain of my soul."

BAXTER. Hear, hear! *(The room applauds for Henley's poem, but Henley stands silent, conflicted.)*

FANNY. *(To Louis.)* Do as you must.

LOUIS. Now, Charles, I crave your assistance for this story.

BAXTER. Me? Barking up the wrong tree, chap. I'm a lawyer, for God's sake!

KATHARINE. Which means you tell fictions all the time. Play along, Charles.

LOUIS. Do you recall a case from Edinburgh some years back: the Crown versus Eugene Chantrelle?

BAXTER. The French tutor? Murdered his wife with opium?

LOUIS. Aye, and four or five others in Scotland, by report. You're familiar with the case?

BAXTER. More than familiar. I actually attended the trial. I knew the man personally.

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LOUIS. Brilliant! Follow me. *(Louis abruptly heads into the drawing room. Baxter shrugs and follows.)*

HENLEY. That's fine...we'll just...sit here.

FANNY. Well, Katharine, we can at least look around the kitchen and figure out what we're making for supper.

KATHARINE. Oh, I wouldn't want to invade your kitchen...

FANNY. Nonsense! Glad for the help. William?

HENLEY. I'll...split some kindling for the stove! *(Fanny exits. Katharine looks a question at Henley. He shrugs.)* It's not a democracy. *(Henley exits out the front door, and Katharine exits to the kitchen.)*

SCENE 4

In the drawing room, Baxter sits. Louis goes to the bottle of ergotine, mixes another dose, drinks.

BAXTER. As long as you're quaffing pharmaceuticals... *(He produces the whiskey bottle.)* Bring a couple minim glasses over here! *(Louis laughs and Baxter pours whiskey into the cups. He raises a toast.)* L-J-R!

LOUIS. L-J-R! *(They drink.)* So you really knew Eugene Chantrelle?

BAXTER. Through Victor Richon, my French teacher.

LOUIS. Fascinating! And did he have a sinister bearing?

BAXTER. Hardly! Charming, really. Respectable family man. Gave French lessons in local schools. He and I would sit over pints and debate translations of Moliere.

LOUIS. But he had a monster hidden inside him that deceived us all. That's the story I want to tell. *(LIZZIE suddenly emerges from the drawing room wall. She seems slightly disoriented, but many things in life confused her, including her murder. When she sees Louis, she gains a flash of clarity. Baxter cannot see her.)*

LIZZIE. There you are, sir! Please, tell my story.

LOUIS. Who are you?

BAXTER. What? Who am I?

LOUIS. Sorry. I meant, what was Chantrelle's wife's name?

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BAXTER. Oh...Elizabeth, I think.

LIZZIE. Lizzie.

LOUIS. Lizzie.

BAXTER. I suppose.

LOUIS. She would have known the real Chantrelle. Was he charming with her as well?

LIZZIE. At first. When I was 'is student, 'e got me...in trouble.

BAXTER. Got her pregnant out of wedlock, the prosecutor said. The family insisted he wed her. And to his credit, he did. A respectable man, by all outward appearances.

LIZZIE. At first 'e was. But after our son was born, 'e started changing. 'E'd fly into a rage, curse me...

LOUIS. Yes, but why did he change?

BAXTER. I don't think he did, at heart. Must've always had a dark soul underneath, at least about women. His promiscuous proclivities were trumpeted by the prosecution.

LIZZIE. Eugene would drink and then go out most every evening to them...them girls of the night.

LOUIS. A frequent patron of the brothels of Clyde Street.

BAXTER. Ha! Can't hold that against him! So were we, back in the day. *(Baxter pours another round of shots.)* Of course we never carried a loaded gun and shot out the windows of Madame Kay's house.

LOUIS. No! Chantrelle did that?

BAXTER. Oh, yes. When he was displeased with the girls. *(Chuckles.)* Of course, I never recall being displeased. *(They laugh and drink. Fanny enters into the Blue Room.)*

FANNY. *(Calling behind her.)* I'll ask him which he wants!

LIZZIE. *(To Louis.)* You...went to them places too? The brothels and whatnot?

LOUIS. Heady days of youth. *(Fanny partly opens the drawing room door, but Louis and Charles do not yet notice.)* Of course, I never could afford your fancy Clyde Street lassies on the pittance my father allowed me--

BAXTER. That's right. You always visited those sixpenny trollops on St. James Square! *(Fanny recoils, pulling the door almost closed but still*

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listening.)

LOUIS. A wee better than that! No, it was Leith Street for me. I remember Claire Drummond. A bonny wee doo, she was. Thought I was in love for sure. Met her at Henry Wilson's tobacco shop. I'd go there several times a week to write--

BAXTER. Oh! This Claire was your "writing partner"... *(They both laugh.)*

LOUIS. I cannae deny we'd find our way to the basement with some regularity. But other times she'd be a completely respectable girl. Pretty young thing, figure like a--

FANNY. *(Opening the door suddenly.)* Mister Stevenson. Mister Baxter. If I can interrupt your *charming* conversation...I came to inquire if you would prefer a meat pie or roast goose for dinner this evening.

LOUIS. Goose.

BAXTER. *(Overlapping.)* Roast goose.

FANNY. Perfect. I'll go *slaughter* one. *(She slams the door and moves toward the front door. Louis is quick to follow her. Lizzie fades out through the wall.)*

LOUIS. Fanny? Are you angry?

FANNY. Am I...am I *angry*? Why would I be angry to learn that my husband is a purveyor of fallen women? I'm sure that's the most normal thing in England!

LOUIS. That was...five years before I met you!

FANNY. There's no statute of limitations on character, Louis!

LOUIS. What is that supposed to--

FANNY. Are you still meeting up with your "writing partners?"

LOUIS. Of course not! *(Off her look.)* What?

FANNY. How do I know that? How do I know?

LOUIS. Because I've never lied to you, Fan. And even back then I did nothing...illegal.

FANNY. Oh, no! Never! As your bosom friend Counselor Baxter is quick to point out, going out *whoring* is a moral issue, not a legal one. A perfectly normal activity for a *respectable* man. *(Pause.)* I just thought you were a *good* one. *(She opens the front door.)*

LOUIS. Where are you going?

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FANNY. To collect our dinner goose to serve your guests.

LOUIS. Can I help you?

FANNY. Go write, Louis. Exorcise whatever demon is driving you. Besides, right now I wouldn't advise coming near me while I'm holding an ax. (*Fanny exits. Blackout.*)

INTERMISSION

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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