

The DEATH of MARY LAMB
(a drama in two acts.)

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance.)

MARY LAMB- early-forties. A vacant, distant look makes her seem detached, as if not truly part of the outside world.

SAMUEL (SAM) TAYLOR COLERIDGE- late-thirties. Haggard, the look of the addict beginning to find its way to his features, his body.

FANNY KELLY- late-twenties. Pretty, still girlish, a trait she prides herself on.

CHARLES (CHARLIE) LAMB- early-thirties. Still retaining the air of youth, as if his growth and maturity stopped in his early-twenties. His innocence has somewhat sheltered him from the hardship of his life.

SARA COLERIDGE- sixteen. An apparition, appearing waiflike, childlike and unhappy.

This play is a work of historical drama. The facts surrounding Charles and Mary Lamb have been compressed, skewed through use of dramatic license, while adhering as closely as possible to the actual events. Ages of characters have been adjusted for purposes of storytelling. All quotes and poems are in bold lettering and spoken by the characters based on the actual persons the quotes and poems are attributed to (see footnotes.) In the case of changing quotes, changed words appear in normal typeface. In the end, I hope I have conveyed the story of Charles and Mary Lamb with sensitivity, honesty (as far as it can go in the genre,) and a respect for the persons and the works they have left behind.

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SETTING:

The action of the play takes place during a few months in the early 1800s in the home of Charles and Mary Lamb as well as in various locations just outside London.

ACT ONE

- I.- Mary Lamb's bedroom. Thursday afternoon.
- II- A street. The same afternoon.
- III- Early that evening in the living room of Charles and Mary Lamb.
- IV- A theatre on the same Thursday evening.
- V- The Lamb living room, later that same night.
- VI- Two private chambers in the Lamb household, that same night.
- VII- The Lamb living room, later still.
- VIII – The Lamb living room. Very late the same night.
- IX – Midnight.

ACT TWO

- I – Charlie's private study in the Lamb household. Afternoon, two weeks later.
- II – The Lamb living room, later that same afternoon.
- III – The Lamb living room. Evening, one week later.
- IV – A street corner, the next day.
- V – The Lamb living room, a few weeks later.
- VI – The Lamb living room and an asylum, a month later.

ACT ONE

I

(Dim light rises on MARY, down center. She is dressed in the undergarments of early 1800's England. Her exposed arms are scarred. In one hand she holds a knife. She stands, staring out, agitated, seemingly distraught. She speaks slowly as she studies her bare arms.)

MARY

**This rose-tree is not made to bear
The violet blue, nor lily fair,
Nor the sweet mignonet:
And if this tree were discontent,
Or wished to change its natural bent,
It all in vain would fret.**

**And should it fret, you would suppose
It ne'er had seen its own red rose,
Nor after gentle shower
Had ever smelled its rose's scent,
Or it could ne'er be discontent
With its own pretty flower.**

**Like such a blind and senseless tree
As I've imagined this to be,
All envious persons are:
With care and culture all may find
Some pretty flower in their own mind,
Some talent that is rare.¹**

(MARY uses the knife she is holding to slash at a bare forearm, drawing a thin line of blood. She stands staring at the cut, her mood obviously improved, less agitated.)

Punish the flesh...

(light fades on her.)

ACT ONE

II

(Light rises on SAM. He walks across downstage. His gait is dictated by the great pain in his limbs and joints. He stops and drinks from a vial of laudanum. Waiting for the medicine to take its desired effect, SAM speaks, bending to rub a knee, a thigh.)

SAM

**Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.**

**Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.²**

(he drinks from the vial again. He relaxes, feeling the soothing warmth of the medicine course through his body. He starts off again as light fades on him.)

ACT ONE

III

(Light rises on MARY. She is dressed plainly. She pours a glass of wine at a small liquor cabinet.)

MARY

I hope you're not going to add drink to your list of vices.

(When MARY is finished filling the glass, light rises on the Lamb living room. There is a sofa, small dining table and chairs, a rocking chair, side tables. Modest. SAM is seated on the sofa. MARY crosses to SAM, hands him the glass and sits. The mood is friendly, informal.)

You promised you were going to try and stop using. I could tell from your eyes when you came in that you haven't.

SAM

The walk over is getting more difficult. I need it to stop the pain. I've become so accustomed to its many effects, both physical and mental, I'm afraid now to be without. It's become my courage. Not only does it relieve the suffering of my limbs, it allows me to keep putting myself out there, writing, lecturing. Otherwise I'm terrified I'd wake up one morning to find I've been a fraud all these years.

MARY

You are regarded as one of the best, have been so considered long before laudanum took its hold.

SAM

Pain, fame and fear...not a good combination for an addictive personality.

MARY

You at a lack of confidence? Everybody loves your work.

SAM

Can hardly call it work. Laborers work, harvesters in the field work, God knows mothers of young children work. What do we do? We tell stories, live in a world of imagery and pretense.

MARY

Words and ideas can influence lives.

SAM

For the unimaginative who need influence to see.

MARY

Are we really the ones who should be leading anyone?

SAM

We see the world differently than they do, who better?

MARY

What happens when the writer's life becomes more interesting to the public than the writer's words?

SAM

The public is fickle, its fascination with any one subject is short lived.

MARY

Not so fickle they easily forget. Once you are marked in their eyes, you remain a target of their scorn.

SAM

We've become celebrated and sometimes I think there's nothing worse, yet, I don't turn my back on the monetary gains of fame.

MARY

Celebrated? Guess it depends what your renown is for. I would not use the word celebrated.

SAM

Celebrated. Celebrity. That's what we are, whether we like it or not.

MARY

I don't like it.

SAM

We are the stories.

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MARY

And all stories have an end.

SAM

The one thing we have no control over.

MARY

For you, your work speaks for itself, and yes, I do use the word work. You, fame goes with the territory. For me...

(MARY turns from him, her agitation momentarily returning.)

SAM

Don't, Mary.

(MARY turns to him, a forced smile.)

MARY

(sardonically.)

A lamb to the slaughter...minus the leg of mutton.

SAM

To have written that piece of filth against you and worse to have the nerve to publish it. Despicable.

MARY

Inevitable. It served their purpose. They told their lies, sold their papers. They treated it like a circus, with me at the center ring, everything but an organ grinder's monkey.

SAM

It's behind you now. You have your own work.

MARY

Maybe you're right, Sam, maybe we are wasting our time with stories and pretense.

SAM

Your work is what helps you to get through, has given you something else to concentrate on. Don't minimize that.

MARY

Yes, I get through, but will things ever be better?

SAM

Better? Worse? There's only different. You're different now, from that scared, frightened woman I met when I first came here. Hiding away from strangers' faces.

MARY

Because I know how cruel strangers can be. And friends too.

SAM

I'm your friend.

MARY

Yes, you are...the others, they...

(MARY stops, struggling to keep her emotions at bay. She continues, calmly.)

You don't judge.

SAM

With my proclivities, who am I to judge anyone?

MARY

When my brother first brought you home, I thought you came to stare, to laugh.

SAM

I never laughed.

MARY

But others have, befriending Charlie, gaining his trust to be brought into the inner circle as it were, just to get a glimpse. It's been so hard on him, he's become very fearful of meeting new people, then you came along...

SAM

Charlie and I understood each other right away. An immediate friendship cemented by our mutual love of the written word and our singular addictions. No questions asked, no excuses offered.

MARY

I assumed everyone knew, read the papers, heard the stories, the malicious gossip, such wonderful tales to tell around the tea table.

(MARY begins pacing, wringing her hands.)

The endless parade of thrill seekers, like vultures outside the door. Mothers dragging frightened children by, telling them that this is what becomes of naughty children. Naughty. If they only knew, I was the most obedient...I'm always amazed when I find someone who doesn't know...how could they not?

(SAM crosses to her, putting his hand on her shoulders, comforting.)

SAM

We are a blessed breed, the artist, so wrapped up in ourselves we are blind, know no other world than the one we invent. Ignorance. Bliss or curse?

MARY

(smiling, straightening herself, regaining her composure.)

In this case, bliss. Thank you.

SAM

Even had I known you under those “*other*” circumstances, all those years ago, I would still find you to be as you are today, gentle and caring despite what others might say. I’m only sorry I couldn’t have helped more during those trying times.

MARY

You owe me no explanations or apologies, friendships don’t require any. But I thank you for your kindness.

SAM

Kindness be damned, I do what I can. It’s you and your brother who have been so kind, as I have nobody else.

MARY

You have your family.

SAM

All I’m good for in their eyes is to support them financially. They want nothing more to do with me than to take my money.

MARY

There must have been some happiness once.

SAM

The most happy marriage I can picture or imagine to myself would be the union of a deaf man to a blind woman.

MARY

Despite what may have happened between you, there’s still your daughter.

SAM

Yes, but my wife didn’t and won’t let me see Sara.

MARY

Sara is still a child.

SAM

Sixteen is hardly a child.

MARY

There's time enough to correct past mistakes so as not to make future ones in regards to her.

SAM

I'm sure my wife has poisoned Sara's mind against me.

MARY

You have the right.

SAM

I gave up my rights the day I took my first dose of laudanum.

MARY

She's your daughter too.

SAM

And the only person I hoped to have a fresh start with. But now I have you, Charlie and my illustrious career.

MARY

A poor substitute.

SAM

There is no substitute for the family we have made, the three of us.

MARY

Then there's...

(MARY hesitates, possibly even blushing.)

...nobody else?

SAM

(sighing deeply and melodramatically.)

Many nobodies...but I don't delude myself that there is or can be anything more between them and me than the occasional tryst and some very amusing nights out together. What serious minded woman would willingly take into her care the tattered remnants of a poet with so singular a desire that is not born of the flesh but of the opiate's den?

MARY

The kind of woman who understands that kind of suffering.

SAM

(slightly distancing himself from MARY.)

And let's not forget that I'm still a married man.

MARY

(clicking her tongue but laughing in spite of herself. MARY reaches out to him, tenderly pushing some hair from his forehead. She lets her hand linger against his cheek.)

You have many good years left. You talk as though life has nothing more to offer than the occasional, momentary delight.

SAM

I'm an old soul and you have many years ahead of you as well and should not spend them hidden away in here, cowering.

(SAM removes her hand from his face and lightly kisses it.)

Time is passing, you should be among people. Find your own life, out from under the shadow of...

MARY

You know that's impossible. I shall never be free of it.

SAM

Mary, you can use this to further your own career. The more you normalize the situation the better. Use your real name to publish all that have you have written. Celebrity can open doors.

MARY

Not celebrity, notoriety.

SAM

Call it what you will but use it against them as they have against you.

MARY

Better I join the traveling side show. All they would want from me are tales of madness. No matter what I write, no matter how innocuous, they will dissect, taking apart every syllable, searching for clues that might explain why I did what I did. They will read every word, simply to see what the freak has to say, for that's what I have become in their eyes, and I'm starting to see the freak in my own.

SAM

When they read the work, they will know there's more to you than...

(now it is SAM'S turn to look away, feeling he has said too much.)

MARY

Don't shy away from it Sam, you're the only one who talks openly about it. Charlie won't let me. He's afraid it will prove too upsetting for me, but really, I think it's upsetting to him.

SAM

Expose it all, every dark element of your psyche. Open up to the world, then let them stand in judgment. Use it in your writing, explore your own motives through this gift we were supposedly anointed with, this wonderful thing we call art.

MARY

An autobiography, a memoir...make the rounds of the music halls, join you on the lecture circuit.

SAM

Why not? Let them stand and stare.

MARY

Give what they want?

SAM

They're already judging you on their terms, let it be on yours. I do, out of necessity. The Great Samuel Taylor Coleridge on a lecture tour, delivering tenuous lectures on subjects I'm supposed to know quite a bit about but immediately forget at the lectern. They only come to see whether or not I'll show up and if I do to discover what state I'm in so as to report my condition to the local harbingers of good taste and morals, in other words, to the harbingers of doom, giving my wife more fodder to be used against me. It may not be ideal but it's a regular, tidy, little stipend. Selling my name. Guess that makes me no better than a whore, whom I've always held in the highest regard.

MARY

I don't know how you stand it, all the things they write about you in the papers, the things they say.

SAM

Some of them are true, some are simply entertaining. I especially enjoy the salacious pieces, detailing my laudanum use and my supposed late night carousing in various dens of vice. They make me feel as if I lead a far more interesting existence than I actually do.

MARY

Private lives as entertainment. Indiscretions as major news. What have we come to?

SAM

The question is, where are we headed?

MARY

I'm not as strong as you. I could never take what they'd say.

SAM

The world is a tough place and you have a long way to go in it. You need to get strong.

MARY

I try, but I get so frightened.

SAM

They're more frightened of you than you are of them.

MARY

I'm frightened of myself, of what I know I'm capable of. Most people think they might be capable of awful things, I know I am, it's a terrible realization to have.

SAM

It's hard to imagine you being capable of those things, and if you let people see who you really are, they will see only you, not something you did years ago.

MARY

Until that other person shows up again, pushing me to the background. I'm frightened of her.

SAM

Fear can be a good thing, Mary. Keeps us alert. And you say you're not strong. You face your demons. I hide from mine.

MARY

Wonder which one of us is the better for it.

SAM

Or the worse.

(light fades on living room.)

ACT ONE

IV

(Light comes up on FANNY, dressed garishly. She stands down, looking out. CHARLIE stands off to the side, entranced by FANNY, who gestures broadly, dramatically, enunciating exaggeratedly.)

FANNY

I am the cousin of the one who was murdered. It may, therefore, be judged indecent in me to come forward on this occasion. But when I see a fellow-creature about to perish through the cowardice of her pretended friends, I wish to be allowed to speak, that I may say what I know of her character. I am well acquainted with the accused. During all that period she appeared to me the most amiable and benevolent of human creatures. She nursed Madame Frankenstein, my aunt, in her last illness, with the greatest affection and care.

(CHARLIE'S demeanour changes. A darkness replaces his joyful countenance. As FANNY continues, CHARLIE becomes more uncomfortable.)

And afterward attended her own mother during a tedious illness, in a manner that excited the admiration of all who knew her. For my own part, I do not hesitate to say that, notwithstanding all the evidence produced against her, I believe and rely on her perfect innocence.³

(light fades on FANNY as CHARLIE speaks, mournfully, shamefully.)

CHARLIE

Perfect innocence. She was still clutching the bloodied knife.

(CHARLIE takes a flask from his pocket and drinks. He sips again before returning the flask to his back pocket as light fades.)

ACT ONE

V

(Light rises on MARY and SAM in the Lamb living room.)

MARY

I don't know what can be keeping them.

SAM

Perhaps Miss Kelly had a change of heart, after all, to dine with in the diminishing light of fading stars is hardly the most appealing of invitations.

MARY

(softly, lovingly, gently resting her hand on his shoulder.)

Your star will never fade.

(CHARLIE enters the scene.)

CHARLIE

Seems we're to be without the presence of my dear Miss Fanny Kelly until later this evening.

SAM

Fanny... sounds like one of those poor relations in a Jane Austen novel.

CHARLIE

May be poor in riches but what a wealth of manner, grace and beauty.

MARY

(bristling.)

You make her sound so charming.

CHARLIE

A young actress trying desperately to carve a career for herself who happened to find me along the way, and thinks I can help her climb the ranks. But strangely, I think she can help me. She provides me with such a feeling of...

(MARY stands, abruptly cutting him off.)

MARY

I do so look forward to meeting her. And what is it keeping her from what may well prove to be the romance of the century?

CHARLIE

Miss Fanny Kelly has secured for herself a role in a public recitation of portions from our own Mrs. Shelley's Frankenstein... which I believe Sam, you are partially responsible for.

SAM

Oh no, that credit belongs solely to Mrs. Shelley.

MARY

And who is Fanny playing? Not the creature, I trust?

CHARLIE

Quite frankly, I don't know her well enough yet to answer the question of whether or not she can pull off playing the creature, but creature or not, I am determined to find out every scintillating detail about her.

MARY

Then more's the pity that your personal endeavours will have to be put off until she can tear herself away from whatever it is she is engaged in and join us.

CHARLIE

Her rehearsals were running behind. I stopped over to fetch her and she sent me on my way, promising to meet us here as soon as she could.

MARY

An independently minded woman. Only speaks in her favor. We'll have to make every effort to see the performance.

CHARLIE

You'll see her best performance here in this living room tonight, when she's playing herself.

SAM

If her best performance is to be for us, I pity you in the late night hours, Charlie, when you are alone.

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(MARY playfully slaps his arm, in mock embarrassment. CHARLIE crosses to the liquor cabinet. He looks at the wine, opens the cabinet and finding only wine, closes it again.)

CHARLIE

It appears I need to catch up. Everyone seems too happy not to be under the influence of one illicit substance or another.

MARY

Can't it just be that we are happy?

CHARLIE

Natural happiness is unnatural.

(CHARLIE exits, SAM automatically turns to MARY who watches CHARLIE'S exit with great interest.)

SAM

Don't worry, he's fine.

MARY

When he's happy like this, I shouldn't worry, but happiness does not last long. Not in this house.

SAM

Rely on Miss Fanny Kelly to keep him from seeing the bottoms of too many bottles.

MARY

He drinks to both celebrate and forget, despair is often a drop away.

(CHARLIE re-enters with a tumbler and a bottle of gin. He fills his glass, mixes a bit of water in, sips and refills.)

CHARLIE

It's not true what they say about not being able to buy happiness because the more I spend on good gin, the happier I get.

(MARY and SAM exchange knowing, amused glances, SAM speaks to MARY conspiratorially.)

SAM

I told you...

CHARLIE

Told her what?

MARY

That you were fine.

CHARLIE

And why shouldn't I be? You worry too much. You shouldn't, Mary. Let me worry for you. That's all brothers are good for to keep their sisters safe. If my job is to keep her safe, it's your job Sam to keep her happy, not brooding about me.

SAM

And that's what I'll do. I have three days before I leave on this infernal lecture. Let me take us all out, when Miss Kelly arrives, a sumptuous dinner...a round of drinks...

(to MARY, a wicked challenge.)

Let's take to the streets Mary, proclaim our freedom. Prove we're not afraid. Give the reporters something to write about.

CHARLIE

(suddenly alarmed.)

Reporters? Have they been around again? Has something happened?

MARY

No, nothing's happened. Now it's you who has to stop worrying.

CHARLIE

Perhaps you spend too much time alone. No one to look after you.

MARY

I don't need looking after.

SAM

I could come round some afternoons.

CHARLIE

Or we could call someone in, join you for tea.

MARY

Who, Charlie, that dreary Mrs. Gillman?

(to SAM.)

She comes round for the exquisite biscuits Charlie sets out for us, her own larder often empty.

(to both.)

MARY (*cont.*)

She keeps at least ten feet distance between herself and me at all times, nervously counting the seconds, keeping one eye on me and one on the clock. Every time it strikes, she shrieks practically jumping out of her skin. On her way out, I always press into her hand a few shillings. Poor thing is always in need. Still, she provides a certain comic relief and she doesn't run about the neighborhood gossiping. But there are times, Charlie when I prefer to be alone. Perhaps we should start a new project Charlie, the second volume of our "Tales from Shakespeare".

(*to SAM.*)

I think Charlie would like to go back to what he considers the more serious art form of poetry, essays and playwrighting. But we started these adaptations and I think it's time we give the public another volume.

CHARLIE

Our, "Tales from Shakespeare," explaining immortal words to children.

(*drinking.*)

A noble effort to be sure and if perhaps there is a bit of money to be had from a second volume, all the better. And you're right, Mary, I have been neglectful. And I shouldn't be, it was those tales took my mind off that dreadful job, nine hours a day sitting at a desk, posting numbers for a company that pushes overpriced products onto an unsuspecting public who think they're getting a deal. But, is it really any different from what all writers do? Don't we sell ideas and isn't poetry and playwrighting nothing more than glorified copywriting to self-consciously sell ourselves? At least that was the tone of one of the harsher critics for my last play, "the self-indulgent musings of a writer not trying to hide behind the veil of fiction." If they were only allowed to see the entire piece before...

(*CHARLIE takes a large swallow from his drink.*)

MARY

(*to SAM.*)

Charlie takes the critical reception to his plays too much to heart. I tell him the Lord Chamberlain would have cut the very words of Shakespeare.

SAM

Mary is right, Charlie. Take no heed of public opinion. The Lord Chamberlain finds fault with every stage production, restricting and cutting the meat so that all plays resemble each other in their banality. Continuing to give the people what they have become accustomed to, drama without thought, or the airless, lifeless comedies that pass for entertainment. The play produced is not the play you wrote.

CHARLIE

Don't get me started on that point.

SAM

Your success is secure, Charlie. Mary, too, would be a success if she would only publish under her own name...you have the talent Mary to branch out on your own.

(SAM stops as CHARLIE reels on him.)

CHARLIE

Sam. To even suggest such a thing. Her name must forever remain out of any publication.

(MARY hangs her head despondently.)

MARY

I think I'll go and freshen-up before Miss Kelly arrives.

(MARY exits. CHARLIE turns to SAM, very concerned.)

CHARLIE

How could you? You know how easily distressed she is. Throwing the idea of publicity up in her face will only make her worse.

SAM

No, stronger. She has a lot of weight to bear and as of now, her shoulders will fall under it.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry. I don't mean to take it out on you, but it's starting again, I see the signs. The shifting moods, the sadness followed by periods of such unrealistic optimism. Locking herself away in her room for hours on end.

SAM

Maybe Mary's right, maybe you do worry too much. She's been fine. Good, hearty spirits.

CHARLIE

She hasn't been fine. I've seen her arms, Sam, fresh wounds over healed scars. She claims that opening her flesh releases the demons that torment her soul. Punish the flesh, she says, for weakness of mind.

SAM

I'm sorry, Charlie, I didn't realize.

(SAM looks off to where MARY has exited.)

**And there upon the moss she sits,
The Dark Ladie in silent pain;**

SAM (*cont.*)

**The heavy tear is in her eye,
And drops and swells again.⁴**

CHARLIE

It's just the beginning stages, we have time to stop it.

SAM

We can try and deal with this bout of hysteria until that time it wants to pull her down again, and it will. You know as well as I do there is no stopping it. Can you stop your affliction or me mine?

CHARLIE

Pain is life - the sharper, the more evidence of life.

SAM

All we can do is to wait for the fall and hope to God it doesn't come to her being locked up again.

CHARLIE

I love her too much to see her go through this. You must see that, I know how deeply you love her too.

SAM

Yes, as her friend. **Love is like a flower, friendship is like a sheltering tree.**

CHARLIE

Then together, we must keep her safe.

(CHARLIE finishes his drink in one gulp and crosses to the cabinet to pour another as light fades.)

ACT ONE

VI

(Light comes up on Sam. He has sneaked away to a pantry. He takes a nip from his vial. He reaches down and rubs his knees, his thighs. He sips again. He sways, enjoying the sensation. SARA enters and stands down. She looks at SAM curiously. SAM sees her and starts, taking a step toward her.)

SAM

(confused, he stops himself from getting too close. He whispers.)

Who is it?

SARA

**HE came unlook'd for, undesir'd,
A sunrise in the northern sky,
More than the brightest dawn admir'd,
To shine and then forever fly.**

**His love, conferr'd without a claim,
Perchance was like the fitful blaze,
Which lives to light a steadier flame,
And, while that strengthens, fast decays.**

(SAM reaches out for her as light fades on him but remains on SARA, who continues.)

**Glad fawn along the forest springing,
Gay birds that breeze-like stir the leaves,
Why hither haste, no message bringing,
To solace one that deeply grieves?**

(light rises on MARY, pacing, mumbling incoherently to herself, the words "punish" and "flesh" can be intermittently heard. MARY holds a knife, one sleeve of her dress is pulled back, exposing her arm. SARA looks at MARY and continues speaking.)

SARA (*cont.*)

**Thou star that dost the skies adorn,
So brightly heralding the day,
Bring one more welcome than the morn,
Or still in night's dark prison stay.⁵**

(MARY holds the knife up, ready to slash at her skin. She stops, frightened, but doesn't know why she is suddenly so frightened.)

MARY

All the demons in Hell...

(MARY slashes at her arm and is immediately placated. SARA slowly backs off, watching. MARY unrolls her sleeve and fastens it at the wrist. Satisfied that her appearance is as it should be, MARY exits, as light fades.)

ACT ONE

VII

(Light rises on the living room. MARY, CHARLIE and SAM are drinking and laughing. FANNY is off to the side, drinking also. She is trying to force a laugh though she obviously did not understand the punchline. FANNY'S face is overly made-up, her tight bodice accentuates a sensual body. She knows she is desired and does her best to keep attention on herself.)

FANNY

I wish I could say such clever and amusing things.

(they turn to her as if they had forgotten she was in the room.)

CHARLIE

The teller of a mirthful tale has latitude allowed him. We are content with less than absolute truth.

FANNY

Does that then make sadness truth?

CHARLIE

Sadness comes in many guises.

FANNY

Mrs. Shelley writes with such honesty about sadness and the hold it takes.

(she recites earnestly, without the gesticulating and over-wrought diction of her theatre performance, proving without knowing it, that she is a true and gifted actress.)

I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. Sometimes I grew alarmed at the wreck I perceived that I had become.

MARY

(suddenly very frightened.)

The freak I have become.

(SAM turns toward MARY. He crosses to her and removes the glass from her fingers. CHARLIE remains under FANNY'S spell. FANNY continues.)

FANNY

The blood flowed freely in my veins, but a weight of despair and remorse pressed on my heart, which nothing could remove. Sleep fled from my eyes; I wandered like an evil spirit...

(aware of the silence, FANNY turns to them. CHARLIE applauds. FANNY speaks, slightly embarrassed at the performance she has just given.)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...it's just...to be honest I never read her book before...well I think those the most beautiful words I've ever heard.

CHARLIE

(beaming.)

And spoken with such...*passion.*

FANNY

Mrs. Shelley understands human pain. To capture such emotion, to be able to put it down on paper.

(a look of great sadness crosses MARY'S face.)

MARY

The pain only a woman can feel. In her breast, her head.

SAM

(quickly intervening, as FANNY glances curiously at MARY.)

Mrs. Shelley splashes her demons across the page, whereas I keep mine healthily bottled-up inside.

(MARY joins the conversation wanting to pull herself from her dark reverie.)

MARY

And what demons so possess you, Sam, that they must be protected?

SAM

The demon's name is laudanum.

MARY

A demon you, yourself chose.

SAM

Chosen? Prescribed? What difference does it make now, my demon is no different than the demon in the bottle or the demon of deep melancholy that can plague the soul. What cause do they to possess any of us?

FANNY

I have no demons.

SAM

The artistic mind is full of nothing but.

MARY

(low, almost to herself.)

A mind that is too full, that won't stop churning, churning so quickly sometimes it staggers, putting you off balance so you can't see, can't think...

CHARLIE

(looking at MARY but not speaking to anyone in particular.)

The sadness of the world, whose shoulders can't bear the weight.

(CHARLIE finishes his drink and crosses to make another.)

FANNY

I don't like sadness.

SAM

It's not a question of like. As artists we should invite these emotions, experience them to the fullest, despite the toll they may take.

FANNY

You think artists suffer more than others?

SAM

You need look no further than the occupants of this room, yourself excluded, for the answer to that question.

FANNY

(not sure if she is being put on or not.)

Why do artists suffer more than others?

SAM

We are immortal.

CHARLIE

(gulping his drink.)

God I hope not.

SAM

Mere mortals could not withstand such suffering.

FANNY

I don't suffer.

SAM

You're an actress. Actors in general aren't immortal. Your performance lives for the moment, then...

(SAM snaps his fingers and continues.)

...the moment's gone.

FANNY

But we bring the feeling, the emotion, the...what was it Charlie...

(CHARLIE crosses to FANNY. He puts his arm around her and kisses her cheek. MARY stands watching the display of affection, not happily.)

CHARLIE

The passion.

MARY

Passion is such an easy word to brandish as if the word itself is a flag of victory. But who truly understands its meaning?

FANNY

Passion is love.

(FANNY snuggles against CHARLIE.)

Charlie knows what I mean.

MARY

I won't let you leave me, Charlie.

(SAM goes on the defensive again, taking MARY'S arm, continuing the conversation in its old vein.)

SAM

You may bring the emotion, but the audience leaves with the author's words and ideas. A manuscript is a document that will be around long after we have all gone. As for a performance, it will only last as long as those who witnessed it remain on this earth, retelling aspects of it but never quite capturing it in words because memory, as we know, is faulty.

MARY

I remember every detail of that day, every word spoken.

(SAM motions to CHARLIE with his head, they exchange places, SAM with FANNY, CHARLIE moving to MARY, much to her delight. She is suddenly at ease. SAM continues, not missing a beat.)

SAM

And even if those who saw your performance, no matter how flawless and fine, stop recounting it to others, then it is gone forever.

(to MARY, comforting.)

The public is fickle, easily lead from one idea to the next...

(back to FANNY.)

SAM *(cont.)*

...so all that remains are the author's words for all eternity.

MARY

From here to eternity? You make it sound like an insignificant journey.

FANNY

But surely not everyone who has ever put pen to paper will be immortal.

MARY

Shakespeare.

SAM

To be sure.

CHARLIE

(somewhat sarcastically.)

Our dear Miss Jane Austen?

SAM

One would hardly think so. I'm afraid Miss Austen's reputation will fade as times and tastes change.

FANNY

I thoroughly enjoy Miss Austen's novels.

SAM

As does every shop girl and lady's maid. Luckily popularity is not a precursor to immortality, and future generations will be spared her shallow wit and lack of dramatic timbre.

FANNY

(offering her opinion carefully, hoping it won't be derided.)

What about Mrs. Shelley? Will she be immortal?

SAM

Undoubtedly.

(FANNY pride in having "got it right," is obvious.)

MARY

(raising her glass, a toast.)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

(SAM raises his glass, returning the salute.)

SAM

One can only hope.

MARY

In my heart, there is none greater.

FANNY

Mr. Coleridge...

SAM

I am not my father, Sam, please.

FANNY

I'm sorry, Sam...

(becoming quite flirtatious, putting MARY on edge once again.)

Do you agree that Shakespeare was the greatest writer?

SAM

Quite frankly, I think I'm the greatest writer, we all think we're the best, don't you agree Charlie?

CHARLIE

Don't encourage him, Fanny.

SAM

The argument over Shakespeare's true or perceived greatness is always brought up by those trying to prove an intellect that does, in fact, not exist in them at all, but I digress, to answer your question...no.

CHARLIE

(a playful warning.)

Sam...

FANNY

But he wrote so many wonderful stories.

SAM

To feed the masses so he could feed himself, money can make us all do terrible things.

CHARLIE

Watch yourself Fanny, quit while he's ahead.

FANNY

You said yourself Shakespeare will be one of the immortals.

SAM

Simply because people will always be in want of intellect.

FANNY

Now you're just making fun.

SAM

How perceptive. Yes, my dear, I am making fun. I take it you have not read my essay, "Shakespeare's Judgment Equal to His Genius"? If you had, you would know where I stand on the question.

FANNY

Is it a very long piece?

(MARY tries to stifle her laughter.)

SAM

That, my Dear, says everything about you I could ever need to know.

MARY

Come Fanny, sit by me, leave that bully. We shall **relate to each other the histories of our past lives, so that we will not then look so unsociably upon each other.**

(FANNY crosses and joins MARY.)

FANNY

I ask too many questions. I always have. I get nervous, don't know what to say, so I ask questions.

(FANNY finishes her wine.)

MARY

Questions are a way to expand the mind and a mind free of ignorance can lead to independence, and that should be every woman's goal, to think and live independently.

FANNY

So often I'm afraid to say what I really think for fear of criticism.

MARY

I have been fortunate that my brother is my guardian for he doesn't censure my thoughts and ideas in regards to literary, artistic and *personal* pursuits, the way a parent or husband would.

(MARY allows her gaze to linger on SAM as she says this last statement, before turning back to FANNY.)

Question everything.

(SAM speaks as he crosses to liquor cabinet to refill his drink.)

SAM

Just don't expect a satisfactory answer to anything.

(picking up the bottle, he shakes it.)

Nothing good ever lasts long enough.

MARY

(watching SAM'S antics with tenderness.)

Charlie. The wine.

(crossing to the sofa, SAM puts a hand on FANNY'S shoulder. MARY reaches out to touch his hand but stops herself.)

SAM

No, no. I'll go. I've tormented our guest enough. Don't take me seriously Fanny, I love to hear myself speak. I wish I could sit in on one of my lectures sometime, finally figure out what they're about.

(SAM exits, MARY and CHARLIE watch him suspiciously. CHARLIE crosses and speaks low to MARY.)

CHARLIE

Wonder how long he'll take this time.

FANNY

He's not at all what I was expecting.

CHARLIE

Tonight he's on his best behaviour, usually he's a beast.

FANNY

Don't mock me. He's quite charming. He was just teasing. He meant no harm. I asked Charlie not to tell you how nervous I was coming here tonight.

MARY

Why? We're just people.

FANNY

Just people? With your reputations.

(FANNY demurely lowers her head wanting to hide her blushing ignorance.)

MARY

(freezing.)

Our reputations. Charlie...

(she reaches out blindly, CHARLIE rushes to take her hand as FANNY looks up.)

FANNY

I know I still have much to learn.

(MARY stands. Her body rigid, her manner stern.)

MARY

Why did you come here?

FANNY

To round out my education, which I know is lacking and what better place...

MARY

(to CHARLIE, coolly.)

She's lying...

(to FANNY.)

You came to point and to laugh...

CHARLIE

No, Mary...

FANNY

What is it Charlie?

MARY

(self-deprecatingly.)

To look at the face of evil.

FANNY

What's wrong Charlie?

CHARLIE

(to FANNY.)

Nothing, there's nothing wrong.

(taking hold of MARY.)

Mary, sit, please. I'll get you some wine.

MARY

(trying to maintain dignity through a rising sense of dread, she speaks low.)

I want her out...

FANNY

(standing, not sure whether to be amused or frightened.)

Charlie?

CHARLIE

Please Fanny, it's nothing.

MARY

There's nothing wrong with me...

(MARY remains hard and cold.)

CHARLIE

Let me handle this.

MARY

It's you. Come here to judge me and to laugh.

(to CHARLIE, trying to keep her voice down.)

They were all pointing and laughing. The names they called us, I'll never forget the names. The things they did to us.

(FANNY backs up, no longer unsure of her emotion, it is fearful. CHARLIE continues to MARY, trying to console the inconsolable.)

CHARLIE

Nobody's pointing, Mary.

MARY

You promised Charlie. You promised to take care of me and then brought her here. You lied Charlie, you lied. You're sending me back, aren't you?

CHARLIE

You're not going back Mary. I'm here.

MARY

(beginning to sob.)

But she's here too. Why is she here, Charlie? To take you away from me?

(MARY continues, forgetting FANNY is there is there in the room.)

You're going to leave me aren't you?

CHARLIE

No, Mary, I'm not leaving.

MARY

(begging, pleading.)

If you do leave me Charlie, I'll have to go back. They won't let me live on my own. You said I would be safe...you lied to me Charlie. You lied.

CHARLIE

I never lied. I won't leave you.

(becoming desperate, MARY clutches CHARLIE, clawing at him, clinging as one clings to a life raft for fear of drowning.)

MARY

Why can't it be just us again, like it used to be, watching out for each other, the three of us taking care of each other...

(On the verge of violence, screaming as SAM enters. He crosses and stands beside FANNY. He is obviously under the influence of laudanum. He watches, not sure if what he is seeing is real or a dream. MARY continues.)

We don't need anyone else. You have me.

FANNY

What is it Sam? What's happening.

MARY

(falling into a state of unbridled weeping and hysteria.)

Why did you bring her?

SAM

(slowly as in a haze, to FANNY.)

You really don't know?

MARY

You told them you'd take care of me...

FANNY

Know what?

MARY

(agonized.)

They'll send me away again.

(CHARLIE tries to hide his face from FANNY'S shocked gaze. SAM turns to FANNY and speaks, matter-of-factly...)

SAM

She was convicted of lunacy.

MARY

Don't send me away Charlie, please...

SAM

After she killed her mother.

MARY

Get her out of here, Charlie...

SAM

Plunged a large carving knife into her mother's breast while preparing dinner.

MARY

(yelling wildly.)

Get her out.

(silence as they watch MARY hanging onto CHARLIE who would like nothing more than to disappear, as light fades.)

ACT ONE

VIII

(Light comes up dimly on SAM on the sofa. He is not asleep, but his eyes are half closed, his body slumped, his head heavy, drooping and lolling. There is the sound of knocking. SARA enters. She stands watching SAM. After a moment, he sits up, afraid. He sees SARA, who speaks.)

SARA

I knocked but nobody answered.

SAM

You were here before.

SARA

You recognize me?

SAM

How could I not recognize my daughter, my Sara?

SARA

No, not daughter. I don't know you well enough to address you as father and you have not earned the right to call me daughter until that time we can forge the bond of parent and child. What are you known by?

SAM

Sam.

SARA

Such a plain name for a great man.

SAM

Not great, just a man.

SARA

Also husband and father.

SAM
Your mother. She wants more money?

SARA
It's not money.

SAM
Is everyone well?

SARA
No.

SAM
Is it serious?

SARA
It's you. You're not well.

SAM
What can I do?

SARA
It's not good for you here.

SAM
I have no place else.

SARA
You've become indolent.

(SAM goes to drink from the vial, SARA takes it away, holding it just out of reach.)

SAM
I'm besieged. The pain becomes unbearable, my limbs ache, my joints scream in agony.
Laudanum is the only way to stop the pain.

(SARA hands the vial back to SAM, who drinks. He holds the vial up to SARA as he speaks.)

But with it I can't write, can't think, without it I can't live.

SARA
You can pray.

SAM

I have.

SARA

(bellowing with the ferocity of a mad preacher trying to keep sinners from the gates of hell. Light suddenly becomes blinding white filling the stage.)

You have prayed with drops of agony on your Brow, trembling not only before the Justice of your Maker, but even before the Mercy of your Redeemer... ‘I gave thee so many Talents. What hast thou done with them?’”

SAM

Sara, please, don't condemn me for being a man.

SARA

Fulfill your father's wishes...

SAM

Please, Sara...

SARA

Return to the clergy and put your life on the righteous path.

SAM

Understand.

SARA

Denounce this debauchery of body and soul.

SAM

I beg of you.

SARA

Only then can you end the pain.

(SARA slowly exits as light fades on SAM tossing and turning.)

ACT ONE

IX

(In the darkness, a clock strikes twelve. Light comes up full on living room. FANNY paces nervously, glancing off in the direction in which MARY and CHARLIE have exited. SAM, still half passed out on the sofa, begins flailing, control of his body seemingly not his own. FANNY turns to him, alarmed.)

FANNY

Sam.

(afraid, wanting to keep her distance, but not wanting to be alone, her plea becomes more forceful.)

Sam. Wake up, Sam, wake up.

SAM

(sitting upright, out of his stupor.)

Where is she?

FANNY

Where is who? Mary? Charlie took her to her room.

SAM

Sara. She was here. My little Sara. Where did she go?

FANNY

There's nobody else.

SAM

Nobody?

FANNY

Just us.

(SAM looks around, realizing it was all a dream.)

SAM

Mary?

FANNY

Charlie took her to her room.

SAM

How long have I been...

FANNY

I'm worried, Sam.

SAM

Don't be. She'll be fine. I promise.

FANNY

Is there something I can do?

SAM

There's nothing any of us can do.

FANNY

I feel so helpless, useless.

SAM

Just another informal Thursday gathering at the home of Charles and Mary Lamb. A weekly event.

FANNY

How can you be so callous?

SAM

(rousing himself.)

And you so callow.

(unsteadily crossing to the liquor cabinet.)

SAM (*cont.*)

Believe me my dear, this episode will repeat itself again and again until we are no longer of this earth.

(SAM pours a mouthful of gin and swallows it. He looks at FANNY.)

Would you like one?

FANNY

Please.

(SAM pours two more, stirs water into one, this is FANNY'S. He crosses to FANNY and hands her the watered down gin.)

Thank you.

(they sip. They are uneasy with each other. FANNY speaks first.)

What happened Sam, was it something I did? She seemed to be accusing me...

(when SAM speaks, it is as if he is trying to clear the clouds in his mind, searching and fumbling for the right words, his speech is slow, low, unemotional.)

SAM

No, it's not you.

FANNY

What made her act like that?

SAM

You really didn't know?

FANNY

What?

SAM

Who she is, what she's done?

FANNY

Only what I've heard.

SAM

(defensively, as if he is being attacked.)

What have you heard?

FANNY

Rumours, innuendo.

SAM

You never read the papers?

FANNY

I'm not from here. Whatever I may have heard was in passing. I didn't pay attention, so wrapped up in my own world.

SAM

The artistic mind.

FANNY

What?

SAM

You know it was Charlie found her, standing over her mother's body, the bloodied knife still clutched in her fingers, those gentle fingers that can so nimbly work a needle and thread, caress a cheek. One would never think.

FANNY

I thought there must be something, evidence, circumstances we didn't know. It's very difficult sometimes to distinguish truth from lies. After all, she was never imprisoned.

SAM

There are places far worse than prison.

(CHARLIE enters. SAM and FANNY watch him silently. He goes to the liquor cabinet, pours a swallow of gin, downs that and immediately pours himself another. He turns and sees them watching him.)

CHARLIE

Fanny...

FANNY

No need to say anything, Charlie. Are you okay? Is Mary?

CHARLIE

She's been fine for so long.

FANNY

What was it, Charlie? Was it something I said or did? Maybe if I apologized.

CHARLIE

(smiling, very pleased to see FANNY.)

You stayed. I wasn't sure you would. Thank you.

FANNY

I wanted to see if you were all right, if there was something I could do.

CHARLIE

You stayed.

FANNY

I won't leave you Charlie.

SAM

But he might leave her.

FANNY

Maybe this isn't the time for your jokes. Your constant bantering after what's happened seems inappropriate, distasteful to me.

SAM

I do apologize. I don't mean to wound your sensibilities. You're young, you can't possibly understand what happened here tonight.

FANNY

Not so young not to know when someone needs me.

CHARLIE

Sam, please.

FANNY

It was an unfortunate incident.

(SAM chuckles at this.)

SAM

An unfortunate incident. I'm sorry if my behaviour is distasteful to you, but no more distasteful than you coming to fawn over the celebrated literati. Don't be too impressed with artists, my dear, you'll only be disappointed in the end to find they're merely human.

CHARLIE

There are times, Fanny, when it's better to disregard what Sam says. When he's like this.

SAM

Don't apologize for me Charlie, we have never had to apologize or excuse ourselves before to each other or anyone else.

(MARY enters unobserved, calm, composed.)

FANNY

Perhaps I'd better go.

MARY

No, please, stay.

(they all fall silent and turn to MARY.)

Give me a chance to defend myself for that...unacceptable display. It was vulgar and crass. But as artists, we tend to be somewhat emotional. And I want to thank you, Miss Kelly.

FANNY

For what?

MARY

That performance of the piece by Mary Shelley. Magnificent. If you could package that passion, as Charlie so eloquently described your recital, you would be a very wealthy tradeswoman. It would appear that Charlie has great affection for you. I'm glad, I truly am happy. I know I'm such a burden to him, an albatross.

(MARY'S façade is beginning to crack.)

Forgive me. I know Charlie you want to be free. You want to be free, to love, to marry and I'm in your way.

CHARLIE

Please Mary. Stop this, it's not too late to pull yourself together.

MARY

I know what it's like not to be free. I know what it's like, watching over someone. Watching over the sick and infirm, it eats away at you until the resentment builds. The resentment builds becoming anger that eats away at you from the inside. Slowly from the inside. You can feel your organs being devoured, getting close to the heart, but you can't let the heart go. If the heart goes there is nothing. You know what I mean, Fanny, I know you understand. You have a heart and you love my brother. Yes? You love my brother, my Charlie, my savior.

FANNY

I...

MARY

I know it. I saw you and him and the passion, the passion you shared. I want passion. I have passion.

(MARY is far too gone for anyone to do anything but watch her descent. MARY is becoming more violent, more aggressive.)

You don't know what passion is. None of you, not real passion. Let me tell you. Let me tell you about passion. To kill someone you have to feel passion; hatred, fear, jealousy, love, some deep seated emotion that drives you to commit so intimate an act. The kind of passion that consumes you, robbing you of rational thought, blinding you to the world around you and what that world means, controlling you until you act out against that passion, having to satisfy its needs, its desires, no matter the price. What lover feels that?

(to FANNY.)

You?

(to CHARLIE.)

You? No. To kill someone, you have to be up close, very near, taking all a person has to give, every breath, feel the life slip away beneath your hands. The body go limp, the screams and cries reduced to a whimper before the silence after release. Years of hatred, pent up frustration. Her incessant nagging, her endless demands. The anger flowing from me as I plunged the knife in, pushing, twisting. I don't know if I felt pleasure or pain. Or are the two inextricably bound? My mother, my mother...

(MARY looks around the room at faces which cannot return her gaze. She settles on CHARLIE. She holds her arms out to him, hoping he will embrace her and keep her safe. She speaks, a whisper.)

Oh God, Charlie, what have I done?

(CHARLIE turns from her. She waits. Finally he speaks, with all the venom he can muster, looking directly at MARY.)

CHARLIE

Perhaps I should never have brought you home.

MARY

Even when I'm home, I'm not here.

CHARLIE

Lost and lonely.

MARY

(to FANNY, who cowers behind SAM as MARY advances on her.)

There is no need to be frightened of my actions. I am what I've become.

CHARLIE

You live in impenetrable and dark shadows. Maybe it would have been better if you were dead too.

(MARY stands, shamed, mortified. Stage goes black.)

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

I

(Light comes up on CHARLIE, sitting at a small candle lit desk. He has a heavy shawl over his shoulders. Dark circles rim his red and swollen eyes. He writes, speaking the words as he does so.)

CHARLIE

**Our governess is not in school,
So we may talk a bit;
Sit down upon this little stool,
Come, little Mary, sit:**

**And, my dear playmate, tell me why
In dismal black you're drest?
Why does the tear stand in your eye?
With sobs why heaves your breast?**

**"When we're in grief, it gives relief
Our sorrows to impart;
When you've told why, my dear, you cry,
"Twill ease your little heart."**

**"O, it is trouble very bad
Which causes me to weep;
All last night long we were so sad,
Not one of us could sleep."⁶**

(CHARLIE picks up the bottle on the side of the desk.)

Sleep. I want to sleep.

(he drinks. Long, greedy swallows. Light fades.)

ACT TWO

II

(Light rises on living room. SAM sits on the sofa, his head in his hands. He groans and rocks slightly back and forth. He is sick, trying to stifle his cries of pain. After a time, FANNY enters. Gone is the make-up and captivating attire. She is dressed plainly. Her hair is pulled back off her face. She brings SAM some water. SAM takes it and guzzles the water, some spilling out of his mouth. When the glass is empty, he hands it to FANNY.)

SAM

Never thought I'd see the day.

FANNY

What day?

SAM

When water would be served straight in this house.

(FANNY begins to exit, SAM stops her with his words.)

She came to me again last night.

FANNY

Sara?

SAM

I know you don't believe me, but I've been off the laudanum two weeks, since that night of Mary's breakdown, and Sara still speaks to me.

FANNY

People don't speak as you say she does.

SAM

When she comes to me, she is not human, but an angel. I know in my heart, it is not just a dream, a hallucination brought on by addiction. Suspension of disbelief my dear, a trait we all must practice, not only for the stories we read and see on stage, but extended to that which we cannot explain or accept in life.

FANNY

Are things any easier? Your legs, I mean.

SAM

My body is wracked with spasms, my limbs cry out in pain so that I can't sleep...but my Sara comes and tells me all will be well when I rid this poison from my life.

FANNY

She's right.

(FANNY again attempts to exit, SAM stops her.)

SAM

I'm sorry. About the way I treated you, the things I said. You don't deserve that.

FANNY

Thank you.

SAM

Why did you come back, after that awful night?

FANNY

I admire Charlie so.

SAM

Everyone does.

FANNY

He's been very kind.

SAM

You know he's in love with you.

FANNY

Perhaps he thinks he is...

SAM

To a man who's never been able to find love, thinking he's in love is the same as being in love.

FANNY

Will he take her back, after she's released?

SAM

If it wasn't for him, Mary would be in prison, or worse, a public asylum for life. Yes, I'm afraid he will take her back.

FANNY

He can't help her.

SAM

You know that and I know that, he'll never hear it, so we must help him. In any way we can.

FANNY

Why do you keep coming back?

SAM

First necessity, now choice. Most of the members of my own family turned their backs on me. Blaming me for this cursed reliance on laudanum. Charlie took me in when I had nobody, no place to go and asked for nothing more in return than friendship.

FANNY

Should you become well again, would your family welcome you back?

SAM

No matter what my future holds, I'll never stray very far from Mary and Charlie. And you?

FANNY

I don't know.

SAM

You're not in love with him, are you?

FANNY

I admire him as an artist, a great thinker.

SAM

But not as a lover.

FANNY

Our relationship is not a long one...

SAM

You are still young. To protect him you think it wise to entertain the possibility of friendship blossoming into love over time. You are an artist of the stage, an artist relies on acumen, gut emotion, instinct. What does your instinct tell you? To flee? But you don't.

(FANNY does not answer, is unable to answer.)

Kindness is not deluding another into thinking he can obtain the unobtainable which he so desires. To be kind often means having to be cruel. Don't delay the inevitable.

FANNY

In future we will have time to discuss it.

SAM

Charlie is not like other men, time does not pass for him as it does for us. His life stopped some years ago, the day Mary...

FANNY

(refusing to listen.)

Perhaps when he is himself again. For now...

SAM

Himself? If you discover who that is, please inform us all, for Charlie has never had the chance to discover who he truly is and is now viewed through the lens of madness, the same madness that envelopes his sister.

FANNY

Madness?

SAM

Matricide is truly one of the most heinous of crimes. **The love of a mother is the veil of a softer light between the heart and the heavenly Father**, and to willingly destroy that through so violent an act can be described as nothing but madness. **A mother is a mother still, The holiest thing alive.**

FANNY

I thank you for your insight, your guidance. I'm not as naïve as you might think.

SAM

Don't confuse naivety with innocence, as so many do. For you, my dear, like Charlie, are a true innocent. It was this innocence that prompted him to do what he considered the right thing, that which dragged him into this cesspool of lunacy. What might he have become had he been allowed to follow his own path? We will never know. He gave up his life for Mary's, don't give up yours for his. It's not a fair trade. Don't get trapped in the darkness of this dungeon. It's too late for me, I've already become infected. The madness of the mind can also infect a place, so you see, my dear, it's the place itself that will begin to swallow you.

FANNY

You speak as though the place were haunted.

SAM

There are ghosts both living and dead. What are we here in this house but ghosts? Shadows of our former selves. We dwell here with the memories, trying to push them away but never really able to escape, though we try through any available means at our disposal.

(SAM reaches down, trying to rub the pain from his knee. He continues.)

And we stay and we die and if you stay, you too will die. Inside.

FANNY

You speak of ghosts of the past, but all I hear are fears of the present.

SAM

What the young don't see are the considerations for the future.

FANNY

I see my future clear before me, Mr. Coleridge.

SAM

Sam, please.

FANNY

Mr. Coleridge.

SAM

Don't take offense, my dear, but don't try to protect him through a misplaced philanthropic sense of duty.

FANNY

It is my Christian sense of morality that keeps me here, and please don't deign to know my feelings for Charlie, I will let that take its natural course.

(CHARLIE enters.)

SAM

There is nothing natural in this house.

CHARLIE

He's right Fanny.

(FANNY crosses to CHARLIE, tenderly leading him to the sofa.)

FANNY

Charlie, good to see you up and about.

(CHARLIE sits, looking up at her.)

CHARLIE

The divine plain face of Fanny Kelly. I prefer you this way, no pretense, no mask. Just your natural beauty.

(CHARLIE takes his flask from his pocket and drinks.)

FANNY

Put that away Charlie. You don't need it.

CHARLIE

What else have I to look forward to each day?

FANNY

I'm here.

CHARLIE

If I could be sure of that, I would need nothing else.

FANNY

(speaking to CHARLIE, but looking at SAM, challenging him to intercede.)

I'll remain as long as you need me.

CHARLIE

What if my need is far greater than your capabilities?

(CHARLIE snatches FANNY'S wrists.)

CHARLIE (*cont.*)

Marry me, Fanny. You're the only joy I've ever known.

FANNY

(gently pulling away.)

Oh Charlie...not in front of Mr. Coleridge.

CHARLIE

Does it matter who knows? I love you Fanny and I believe you care for me too.

FANNY

Of course I do Charlie, I wouldn't be here otherwise.

SAM

The promise of burgeoning affection, inviting, as delicate as a newly hatched phalarope, its wings too soft to soar.

FANNY

(turning to look at SAM.)

Please, Charlie, perhaps we can discuss this another time.

CHARLIE

Why wait? If you love me...

FANNY

Love is not something you jump into.

SAM

Love and money, the two things you are never supposed to ask for.

CHARLIE

(becoming excited at the prospect.)

Why not? Why can't we ask for love, we all need it, all want it.

(he again takes FANNY'S hands.)

I'm asking you, Fanny, for your love.

FANNY

You're still very much a boy inside that head of yours.

CHARLIE

(laughing playfully.)

Boys are capital fellows in their own way, among their mates; but they are unwholesome companions for grown people. Will you marry me, Fanny?

(FANNY turns away. CHARLIE crosses to her, turning her to face him, his pleasure beginning to subside as he senses her reluctance.)

You do love me? Fanny? Answer me, please.

FANNY

I couldn't bear what they would say.

(CHARLIE drops his hands to his side, he stands, immobile.)

SAM

(SAM turns away, deeply wounded by their pain.)

Wings too soft to soar.

CHARLIE

Only you can save me from this hell.

FANNY

I can't be that for you.

CHARLIE

You're the only one who can.

(again he crosses to FANNY.)

We can get away from here, live where nobody knows my name. Start a new life, together.

FANNY

It's easy to say that while Mary's locked away.

CHARLIE

We can find a place for her to get the rest she needs. There's a doctor, a friend, out in the country...

FANNY

She'll always be there between us.

CHARLIE

If I have you I won't need anybody else.

FANNY

Oh Charlie, you've been such a good friend to me, the first person I got to know when I arrived. I cherish our times together, will remain by your side...

CHARLIE

But not as a wife.

FANNY

As a companion, a devoted companion.

CHARLIE

(as CHARLIE speaks, FANNY, moves, wanting to avoid making eye contact, any contact with him. CHARLIE follows, trying to cajole her into believing him, all the while trying to convince himself as well.)

I always dreamed of marrying and starting a family, never imagining it could ever come to pass until I saw you...oh Fanny, please give me a chance to prove to you...we can get away, and have children, lots of happy children...

FANNY

I could never bring a child of yours into this world, I...

(FANNY stops, knowing she has said too much.)

CHARLIE

What do you mean a child of mine?

FANNY

Please don't push me for an answer.

CHARLIE

Why could you never bring a child of mine into this world?

FANNY

I try not listen, don't want to believe but the things I hear...

(to SAM.)

Rumours and innuendo.

CHARLIE

What things?

FANNY

Things impossible to believe.

CHARLIE

Tell me.

FANNY

Oh Charlie...

CHARLIE

No matter how painful.

FAN

I am sorry, so dreadfully sorry.

CHARLIE

(grabbing FANNY by the shoulders, he shouts with all the ferocity he can muster, his voice shaking the very timbers of the house.)

Tell me.

SAM

She's not to blame.

(CHARLIE lets FANNY go with a shove, she stumbles, but does not fall.)

CHARLIE

I need to know where I stand so I can stop deluding myself.

(calmly, to FANNY.)

What have you heard?

FANNY

That your sister's quandary may also be your own. Is it true? Were you...away?

CHARLIE

(formally bowing to FANNY as he speaks.)

The six weeks that finished last year and began this your very humble servant spent very agreeably in a mad house at Hoxton—I am got somewhat rational now, and don't bite any one. But mad I was—and many a vagary my imagination played with me, enough to make a volume if all told.

(to SAM.)

Perhaps that's what we should do, Sam, publish our eccentricities, our exploits. Every repugnant, base and disgusting contradiction of our minds. Push them onto the bookseller, so every repugnant, base and disgusting man, woman and child can read about our shortcomings and feel infinitely better about themselves. Have something real to talk about rather than immersing themselves in rumour and innuendo.

(to FANNY.)

I have nothing to hide in that regard. Is that all?

(FANNY hesitates, looking from CHARLIE to SAM. CHARLIE continues.)

How can you say whether you truly love me or not until you know everything? Speak.

FANNY

(in her fright, she looks to SAM for help.)

Mr. Coleridge...Sam.

SAM

The only way to put the ghosts to rest is to free them from their confines.

CHARLIE

You know my sister and I share a degree of madness, is there worse to come?

FANNY

(the words won't come and if they do, she cannot make herself speak them aloud.)

They say...I can't...

CHARLIE

(harshly.)

Speak.

SAM

(gently.)

Speak, my dear.

FANNY

(slowly, with much trepidation.)

They say you have lain with your sister and that is why you form no other relations...

(a wave of shock passes through the room. CHARLIE explodes.)

CHARLIE

To disparage and soil the family bond and turn duty into something so vile...

(FANNY, trying to appease him.)

FANNY

Of course I know it can't be...

CHARLIE

Don't.

(he holds up a hand to stop her as he looks at SAM.)

Did you know about this, Sam, these rumours?

SAM

Yes.

CHARLIE

Why wouldn't you tell me?

SAM

The workmen at the pub are as facetious and malicious as society ladies at a church bazaar. No topic of conversation that can remove them from the mundanity of their tedious existences is off limits, despite their pious airs. It's meaningless drivel, nobody believes these rumours to be true.

CHARLIE

Have you, yourself, disputed these rumours publicly, stood up for my good name?

SAM

To give public credence to such stories whether to defend or to deny is to give them weight they otherwise would not have, weight that keeps them at the center of all such chin-wagging and idle gossip.

CHARLIE

Idle gossip? To have my life raked across the coals, to have my sister's agony disparaged in so disgusting a manner as to make me want to vomit can hardly be dismissed as idle gossip.

(turning to FANNY, angry, pleading.)

What else?

FANNY

Nothing.

CHARLIE

Don't lie to me.

FANNY

They say the madness is passed down from parent to child, generation to generation and that any child of yours would be cursed to live the same fate.

CHARLIE

And not one shred of evidence to back up such calumny.

FANNY

I know there is no validity to these lies.

CHARLIE

But...

FANNY

And I have no knowledge of such things.

CHARLIE

So a mason's son shall be a mason and his and his son after that and after that, never breaking the cycle.

FANNY

I just can't.

CHARLIE

(contemptuously.)

Observe her Sam, the great lady of the stage. Full of life's fire and emotion. Just a girl playing the part of a woman.

SAM

Please, Charlie.

CHARLIE

(crossing to FANNY.)

Once heard never to be unheard, truth does not matter. Am I to have no life of my own?

FANNY

(anger momentarily replacing her gentility.)

How could I bear a child, always watching for a sign, waiting day after day, year after year, wondering if I too shall be...

(she stops.)

CHARLIE

(suddenly excited again.)

What? Murdered by your own child? Say it, Fanny, say it out, don't be afraid. Let's have it all out, lay our feelings and prejudices bare. Then there shall be no walls between us. Be the woman I know you are. Together we can weather anything they throw at us. Be strong.

FANNY

I am. I'm strong enough to tell you no. You, for whom I have the utmost respect, the deepest of feeling...

CHARLIE

(quietly.)

Get out.

FANNY

To tell you no takes strength I didn't know I possessed.

CHARLIE

(screaming.)

Get out.

FANNY

I said I came here to round out my education...I now know how cruel life can be. Goodbye Charlie. Sam.

(FANNY looks around, collects a scarf, her hand bag. She begins to exit, stops and turns to speak. She cannot. FANNY exits. SAM and CHARLIE turn to look at each other.)

CHARLIE

Why does man do everything in his power to destroy himself? Are we born to it, or is it some circumstance along the way that dictates our paths? Are we helpless against it? Is our destiny perhaps not to be immortalized for our professional endeavours but rather for our personal failures?

SAM

The happiness of life is made up of minute fractions - the little, soon forgotten charities of a kiss or a smile, a kind look or heartfelt compliment.

CHARLIE

And the misery of life. What is that made up of?

SAM

Would you please, Charlie, go to the apothecary for me? The pain has become unbearable.

(CHARLIE looks at SAM a moment before exiting as SARA enters. SARA watches SAM with pity. SAM cannot endure to see her and turns his face away in shame.)

SAM

(angrily, rubbing his legs.)

You bid me rouse myself—go, bid a man paralytic in both arms rub them briskly together, & that will cure him. Alas! he would reply that I cannot move my arms is my Complaint & my misery. I'm sorry, Sara, I am but human after all.

(light fades.)

ACT TWO

III

(Light comes up on SAM, on the sofa, sitting up, a vial of laudanum in his hand. SARA enters, sits beside him and takes the vial from his hand. She looks at it closely, sniffs it and goes to drink. SAM snaps awake, takes the vial from her and looks at her. He smiles, the benevolent smile of a loving father. Tears well in his eyes.)

SAM

**I know 'tis but a Dream, yet feel more anguish
Than if 'twere Truth. It has been often so:
Must I die under it? Is no one near?
Will no one hear these stifled groans and wake me?**

**Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,
With the old Moon in her arms ;
And I fear, I fear, My Master dear !
We shall have a deadly storm.**

(SARA kisses SAM'S hand. She stands and exits. Light rises full on the living room. MARY sits quietly, going about her needlework. She has aged. Her face is ashen, her hair has lost any shine it may have had and hangs, greying in loose strands around her puffy face. She has the manner and gait of a woman much older than her actual years. Her voice deeper, no longer carrying a young woman's lilt. CHARLIE sits, drinking alone at the table. He is happy, the happiness of delirium. He speaks as if addressing a group of listeners.)

CHARLIE

Children love to listen to stories about their elders, when *they* were children; to stretch their imagination to the conception of a ...great-uncle or aunt, whom they never saw. It was in this spirit that my little ones crept about me the other evening to hear about their great-grandmother...who lived in a great house...which had been the scene—so at least it was generally believed in that part of the country—of the tragic incidents which they had lately become familiar...

(he trails off, lost in the haze of alcohol.)

MARY

The children again.

SAM

I have often thought what a melancholy world this would be without children, and what an inhuman world without the aged.

MARY

Poor Charlie. When he's with the children, his dream children, there's no pulling him back until the sunrise has lifted the gin-soaked shroud from his eyes.

(MARY chortles to herself, enjoying the irony.)

And they call me mad.

(there is silence. MARY continues her needle-work, not looking up. After a time, she speaks.)

I know he blames me, holds it against me that he is alone.

(MARY looks around the room and realizing she is not being heard, speaks abruptly.)

I have decided to publish...

(both SAM and CHARLIE are roused by this sudden statement which shatters the silence. MARY laughs, seeing their startled expressions.)

Is that such surprising news? After all, it was you suggested it, Sam...

SAM

And shall you do so under your own name?

MARY

The courts may have deemed me a lunatic, but I am not a fool.

CHARLIE

(venomously.)

And what area of expertise are you to expound on for public consumption? Certainly not culinary skills in the kitchen.

MARY

I have decided to undertake the task of writing about needle work and the independence to be derived from such work. A skill to be sharpened and sold so women too may make advantageous contributions to a household. We toil as much as any man, why should we not

MARY (*cont.*)

reap the benefits of our sweat? It's time we begin to disband the customs and traditions. My mind is busy, thoughts and ideas flow so freely, to sit idle would surely send me down that dark path to the asylum again.

SAM

And under what name do you presume to publish if not your own?

MARY

Sempronia, born of noble birth, a Roman leader amongst women.

CHARLIE

Why not Joan of Arc, Mary Queen of Scots, Catherine the Great, for they too were noble and great women of whom you profess so much admiration.

MARY

A lady's magazine has expressed interest in such a piece, knowing that a woman's independence rests squarely on her ability to earn an income.

CHARLIE

Miracle of miracles if you remain lucid enough to finish it.

MARY

Then I shall have credit for trying. All you finish lately is a bottle of gin.

CHARLIE

What else is there for me?

MARY

Drink makes you disagreeable, Charlie.

CHARLIE

It's why I drink that makes me disagreeable. The lives we lead. Look at us, characters in a sordid little drama of our own doing.

SAM

Suspension of disbelief in life.

MARY

Good to see the dramatist still alive and well in you, Charlie.

CHARLIE

You mock me...

(wounded by the accusation, MARY stops her needlework and stands, starting toward him, he hurries away from her touch.)

MARY

Oh no, Charlie, never, my own, my dear brother. Why must we always be at each other? What's happened to the days of care free conversation, when dreams, desires and hopes could be conferred upon and looked forward to?

CHARLIE

(laughing derisively.)

Dreams? Desires? What hopes? For whom? We don't speak, we talk in fragments pulled from the recesses of bruised and battered souls. Look what we've become. The company we keep. A addict, a drunk and a murderess, spinning webs, creating deceits so as not to face the real pain of living.

MARY

Perhaps that should be the subject of my next article.

CHARLIE

Do you ever stop to listen to yourself?

MARY

The artist's dilemma. How we, actors and artists and writers and such love to talk of our pain, our suffering. The artist's suffering is no greater than anyone else's, but we exact that our suffering carry more weight, is somehow more important than your average layman or housewife or even street walker for that matter. But I can tell you differently. I have seen the suffering of humankind in hospitals. Hospitals. Let's call them what they are, asylums for the insane. And those inmates, yes inmates, not patients, suffer far more than any of us here, including myself...

CHARLIE

The difference is, those in the asylums and hospitals may not be fully aware of their suffering.

MARY

When someone kicks a dog, the dog whimpers and hides so as not to be kicked again. In the asylum, there's no place to hide.

(MARY stands, beginning to wander around the room, thinking, trying to find the words. She speaks, as if lost in a dream. Alarmed, CHARLIE and SAM revive themselves and follow, cautiously watching every move. MARY continues.)

Birds are the truly divine among us.

CHARLIE

Birds?

MARY

They don't have to hide. They take to the air and they fly, fly away from the pain, the despair. I watch them and my heart fills with envy. A caged bird is the saddest sight of all.

(MARY starts then continues in a frightened, hurried voice.)

I feel as if I'm in a cage...I can't get past the bars of the gates...

SAM

Mary, come back.

MARY

They won't let me.

CHARLIE

It's too late, Sam.

MARY

I can't get out. A long courtyard leads to the gates. Along the walls are cells no larger than an ordinary kitchen cupboard. That's where they keep the lunatics who talk gibberish to themselves, muttering and sputtering out guttural sounds...each cell has a door with a window and bars on the windows so the guardians can see into the rooms. The poor things inside throw themselves against the doors, trying desperately to escape the confinement, to breathe air that doesn't contain their own putrid odors and filth.

CHARLIE

(quietly, with great tenderness.)

You've never known such a place, Mary.

MARY

(not hearing him, she continues babbling.)

And the others...who need to be chained who might attack and cause serious harm to another inmate or guardian. The dangerous, the criminally insane. They are beat back with sticks and iron bars.

CHARLIE

(to SAM.)

That which she fears most...

(SAM and CHARLIE watch MARY as she continues down the path of madness.)

MARY

The ladies come on holidays to observe the conditions.

CHARLIE

She has convinced herself is true.

MARY

On these days we are warned...

CHARLIE

That bedlam awaits.

MARY

If the ladies appear unusually upset, we are punished.

SAM

To one on the precipice of sanity...

MARY

Punishment that goes beyond slaps and shouted invectives.

SAM

The lie of the mind becomes truth.

MARY

The great ladies are paraded past the screeching and jabbering lunatics...

CHARLIE

(to SAM.)

It appears her time has come again.

MARY

Mothers parading their children by...this is what happens to naughty children, they say. Thrill seekers, like vultures...reporters calling me filthy names...a lamb to the slaughter...

SAM

(drinking from his vial.)

I am so sorry Charlie.

MARY

They gossip, pointing and laughing...

CHARLIE

Nobody's laughing, Mary.

(MARY stops and turns, looking at SAM and CHARLIE as if she doesn't recognize them. She speaks to them, pleading.)

MARY

Why do they laugh? I have done nothing wrong. I am going to publish. Show them I am sane and rational...so they won't laugh anymore.

SAM

(lightly, trying to soften the mood.)

Perhaps, Mary, you can provide a narrative to go along with all of the Rake's Progress, Bedlam being the center piece. There's an endeavour worth undertaking. For what you have just told us is Hogarthian in all its glory.

MARY

There is nothing glorious about that kind of suffering.

SAM

(treading carefully.)

Merely suggesting a series of future articles, my dear Sempronia.

MARY

Ah yes, laugh, but your derision won't stop me.

SAM

(quietly apologetic.)

No derision at all...Mary.

MARY

(angrily.)

I am not responsible.

(pointing to SAM)

MARY (*cont.*)

For your discontent.

(*to CHARLIE.*)

Or yours. Our discontents are our own. Given to us by Him. He sees fit to give us what He thinks we can handle. The children of God. Given our burdens to bear. He is our guardian, our guardian...the guardians strap me in, tie my arms. She killed her mother, they say. Don't be fooled by her demeanour, she is a killer. I can't use my arms, my arms are tied.

CHARLIE

To keep you from harming yourself.

MARY

I can't open my flesh, the demons are inside wanting to get out but my arms are tied. My arms are tied and the demons are raging and the guardians touch me...they touch me.

CHARLIE

Nobody's touching you, Mary.

MARY

I so want to be touched to be loved. To know the kind of love you've known, Charlie. Please, Sam...

(*to SAM, reaching out for him.*)

Love me, touch me...I want to know what it is to be wanted, touch me...the way a man touches a woman.

(*SAM turns away. MARY continues.*)

But not like they touch me. They do other things, in the blackness of night, but I don't cry out. Others do, you hear them in the distance, the cries and screams. Terrible screams but I don't scream, I bear my burden as God would have it...silently to atone for my sins. My sin.

(*MARY turns to them.*)

One act, one decision can leave scars so deep they can never heal, scars on the mind. One act can brand you for life giving you a public identity that is so different from the private identity you have of yourself. In the public's eye will I ever be known as anything other than a killer?

(*to CHARLIE.*)

MARY (*cont.*)

Charlie. What's wrong with me, Charlie?

(*CHARLIE goes to MARY and embraces her.*)

CHARLIE

Nothing, Mary. There's nothing wrong.

(*to SAM, over MARY'S shoulder.*)

What will be the final break, that from which there is no return?

(*lights fades.*)

ACT TWO

IV

(Light rises on SAM and CHARLIE. They stand in a downstage corner. There is the sound of a light rain. They hold umbrellas. In his other hand, SAM holds a small leather travel bag.)

SAM

I'll be staying with a doctor in Highgate. He promises to curb this need for laudanum.

CHARLIE

I'll miss you more than I can possibly say.

SAM

Then say nothing.

CHARLIE

And we are supposed to be men of letters.

SAM

Men of letters? More likely cowards. We were wrong to accept each other, to never question or demand more from each other. To wallow in our addictions and illnesses, for that's what we have, illnesses of the mind of the body. We put so much stock in being men of letters, justifying our eccentricities, our idiosyncrasies, never acknowledging the imperfections and weaknesses that have really dictated our lives.

CHARLIE

The artist's birth right.

SAM

Perhaps. If it wasn't for you Charlie, I would say the artist's refusal, even inability, to accept responsibility. But you are the exception to the rule. You have taken on more responsibility than should be allowed for any one man. Sister or no sister, most men would have agreed to let her live out her days under lock and key, never once looking back.

CHARLIE

I deserve neither praise nor congratulations. The courts granted me custody and I never questioned my decision. **I could be nowhere happier than under the same roof as her.**

SAM

If you ever need me, please don't hesitate to send word.

CHARLIE

I need to stop needing people.

SAM

We all need someone, or we permit *something* to fill that gap.

CHARLIE

Mary needs me.

SAM

What do you need?

(CHARLIE hesitates, not sure how to answer. SAM continues.)

Will you be okay, Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yes. And you?

SAM

All any of us can do is try.

CHARLIE

And Sara?

SAM

Salvage what I can, before I lose her for good.

CHARLIE

What lives we have carved for ourselves.

SAM

Hiding ourselves behind wit, sarcasm, gin and laudanum. Watching, suspecting, waiting for one or the other of us to sink to the darkest depths of his own despair. Very time consuming and not very productive.

CHARLIE

What will posterity do with us, I wonder.

SAM

Fortunately, we will never know.

(a brief silence. SAM puts his bag down and places his hand on CHARLIE'S shoulder.)

What about Mary, Charlie? When she gets out this time, how long before the next episode, they happen with more frequency.

CHARLIE

I'll do what I vowed to do. To keep her safe.

SAM

For how long? She's been hurting herself again.

CHARLIE

Punish the flesh, she says, for weakness of the mind.

SAM

Be safe.

CHARLIE

One thing, the only thing I have ever been sure of, is that Mary would never harm me.

SAM

I love you both, dearly.

(they embrace. SAM continues, looking off.)

The carriage. And so my friend, off to see what troubles lie ahead.

(CHARLIE exits, as SARA enters. SAM sees her.)

SARA

It's time, Father.

SAM

You called me Father.

(SAM picks up his bag and joining SARA, they walk across downstage together.)

Oh yes, daughter, it is beyond time.

(they exit, as light fades.)

ACT TWO

V

(light rises on MARY sitting in the rocking chair, doing her needlework. She speaks.)

MARY

I begin from the day our school commenced. It was opened by your governess...I pass over your several arrivals of that day. Your governess received you from your friends in her own parlour. Every carriage that drove from the door I knew had left a sad heart behind.

(MARY stops speaking, her thoughts are jumbled. Light rises full on stage. CHARLIE is at the table, writing.)

It wasn't school, was it, Charlie?

CHARLIE

No. You've never been to school.

MARY

Then what was it?

(CHARLIE doesn't answer. MARY laughs.)

Oh, I remember. It was the hospital. Such a pleasant name for a mad house, as if you can be cured there. But you can't, because there is no cure for what I did. I can never bring her back, can I Charlie?

CHARLIE

No, Mary. You can never bring her back.

MARY

Why have we lived like this? Why us?

CHARLIE

I don't know.

MARY

Perhaps it was to pay for this gift we were given.

CHARLIE

What gift?

MARY

The gift of art, of being able to write, to create. Maybe it doesn't come free.

(they fall silent. MARY speaks.)

I'm sorry, Charlie.

CHARLIE

For what?

MARY

Putting the burden on you.

CHARLIE

It hasn't been a burden.

MARY

Just **an uneasy kind of ease, a comfort of rather an uncomfortable sort.**

CHARLIE

A journey.

MARY

How kind of you to say that. I thank you for it. I can never repay you for what you've done.

CHARLIE

You owe me nothing.

MARY

Why did you do it Charlie, save me? Duty? Honour?

CHARLIE

No, Mary. Love.

MARY

No regrets?

CHARLIE

None.

MARY

I love you too, Charlie.

CHARLIE

Mary.

MARY

Yes?

CHARLIE

I've never asked this before and I'll never ask it again. But this one time I'm asking...why did you kill Mother?

(MARY considers the question then speaks slowly, carefully.)

MARY

What was that...Sam used to say about suspension of belief?

CHARLIE

Disbelief. To be able to believe that which we know to be neither true nor real. Why, Mary?

(MARY looks at CHARLIE a long while. Finally she holds out her hand. CHARLIE rises and takes her hand as light fades.)

ACT TWO

VI

(Tight spot comes up on CHARLIE. He speaks.)

**I have had playmates, I have had companions,
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days,
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.**

(as he continues, light comes up dimly on stage.)

**I have been laughing, I have been carousing,
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies,
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.**

(FANNY enters, CHARLIE looks at her with tender longing. He goes to her and speaks.)

**I loved a Love once, fairest among women:
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her -
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.**

(SAM enters with SARA, they are holding hands. They stand. CHARLIE smiles as he addresses them.)

**I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man;
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.**

(light fades on stage but remains on CHARLIE as he continues the next verse.)

**How some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed -
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.**

(CHARLIE remains silent as light rises on a chair, a lone chair down center. MARY is seated. She is in a straitjacket. CHARLIE speaks.)

CHARLIE (*cont.*)

**I had a mother, but she died, and left me,
Died prematurely in a day of horrors -
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.**

(CHARLIE crosses, kisses MARY on the top of her head and exits. MARY looks out, she is smiling. She speaks slowly, contentedly as if in a wonderful dream.)

MARY

At midnight when I happen to awake, the nurse sleeping by the side of me, with the noise of the poor mad people around me, I have no fear. The spirit of my mother seems to descend, and smile upon me, and bid me live to enjoy the life and reason which the Almighty has given me -.

(MARY begins to weep but continues through the tears.)

I shall see her again in heaven; she will then understand me better, my Grandmother too will understand me better, and will then say no more as she used to Do, "...what are those poor crazy muddled brains of yours thinking of always?"

(light fades on MARY, her eyes shining, tears falling down her cheek.)

END OF PLAY

NOTES

1-Envy- Mary Lamb

2-The Rime of the Ancyent Mariner- Samuel Coleridge

3-Frankenstein- Mary Shelly

4-The Ballade of the Dark Ladie- Samuel Coleridge

5-From "Phantasmion" - He Came Unlook'd For- Sara Coleridge

6-End of May- Charles Lamb

The Old Familiar Faces (c. lamb)

the end of may c.lamb

letters and quotes...

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