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The Excursion: A Screenplay Adaptation of Francis Brooke's *The Excursion*

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts

by

Jennifer Sim Daniel

May 2011

Dr. Jennifer Barker, Chair

Dr. Judith Slagle

Dr. Frederick Waage

Keywords: Brooke, *The Excursion*, Screenplay Adaptation, Eighteenth Century Theatre

ABSTRACT

The Excursion: A Screenplay Adaptation of Francis Brooke's *The Excursion*

by

Jennifer Sim Daniel

My master's thesis consists of a screenplay adaptation of the Eighteenth Century novel *The Excursion* by Francis Brooke, as well as an Introduction that details the writing process of the main text. In order to prepare this manuscript, I began with a study of both Francis Brooke and her novel as part of Dr. Judith Slagle's Eighteenth Century British Novel course and developed my work to completion through independent research on and application of my findings on the screenwriting genre. The concluding product is a three-act screenplay which maintains the original period setting, speech, and costuming while adding such contemporary elements as 20th century music. Such a combination of time periods enables the stillness of the page to become the action of the screen even as it highlights the universal themes of Brooke's original text.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How Hard Can It Be?

A Journey in Screenwriting: The Adaptation of Francis Brooke's *The Excursion*

In the Fall Semester of 2008, I was in the midst of studying the evolution of the British novel in Dr. Judith Slagle's Eighteenth Century Novels course. After taking inventory with *Moll Flanders*, trudging through *Pamela*, and being disconcerted (to say the least) by *Tristram Shandy*, I found myself spending a pleasant Saturday afternoon with a slim text that I could not seem to put down. Having planned to read about a half of the novel that day and to finish the next, I assumed this work would be much like the other texts I studied throughout the course. However, with its neat, concise chapters and engaging coming-of-age tale, Francis Brooke's *The Excursion* is something all together different from its predecessors. Through the delightful story of the very naive Miss Maria Villiers, Brooke introduces her own blend of social commentary and reflections on the practices of her brand of business—the theatre (Baksheider and Cotton xxix-xxxvi). Brooke's novel is, as Dr. Slagle often says, a wonderful blend of a Fielding satire and an Austen novel of manners.

Given the film success of adaptations of both Fielding's and Austin's works ("Henry," "Jane"), it is surprising that no one has adapted *The Excursion*. But perhaps, this lack of adaptation is due to a sad lack of knowledge about Brooke's novels. Dr. Slagle recently mentioned to me that her predecessor in Eighteenth Century studies at East Tennessee State University had never read *The Excursion* until Slagle introduced it to him. Known primarily as a playwright and a highly successful theatre manager in an

era when women simply did not do such things (Backscheider and Cotton xxxi, xxxvi-xxxviii) , Brooke's talent as a novelist appears to be lost somewhere inside the long Eighteenth Century, at least that is, from the perspective of the silver screen. Ironically, it is in the world of acting that Brooke made such a mark, and it is this background knowledge that causes *The Excursion* to read fairly cinematically, with her chapter divisions forming scenes of sorts (Slagle).

After finishing my first reading of her work, I spent the following class session discussing much of the above information with Dr. Slagle and my classmates. Slagle mentioned jokingly that someone should write a screenplay adaptation of the text, and we all laughed and went on with our scholarly commentary. However, a seed had been planted. As a part-time, commuting graduate student and full-time high school English teacher, I needed an independent study for the coming summer. I had already exhausted my on-site summer course options the previous summer term and was looking for a way to earn at least six credit hours while also saving on fuel expenses. It struck me then that perhaps I needed to write a screenplay adaptation of *The Excursion*; after all, I said to myself, "Sylvester Stallone wrote a screenplay. Ben Affleck wrote a screenplay. How hard can it be?" Having come to the conclusion of this project, I can only say that I have an immense amount of respect for those two gentlemen and apologize for any superiority complex I apparently suffered from at the onset of my experience. But, I digress.

Planning to write the screenplay as an independent study, I approached Dr. Slagle and Dr. Robert Sawyer, the Graduate Coordinator at that time, with my idea. They responded that while I could not expect to earn six hours of credit for an independent study, I could do this project as a master's thesis. I would only earn three hours of credit,

but since I would be writing a thesis, I would only need 30 total credit hours toward graduation and only have to complete three of the four sections of the MA exam. The logic of this solution could not be denied, and I jumped wholeheartedly at the opportunity. Having engaging source material from the start made it a little easier to imagine writing a piece in an unfamiliar genre. However, before I could really proceed, I had to teach myself how to write a screenplay. It was at this point that I truly realized the scope of what I had undertaken.

In order to move forward with the project, I worked with three main texts on the art of screenplay writing: Robert McFee's *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*, Linda Seger's *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*, and William M. Akers's *Your Screenplay Sucks! 100 Ways to Make It Great*. Based on the recommendation of a friend involved in both theatre and cinematography, I began with McFee's work. *Story* is exactly what its name implies—a text devoted to explaining how to tell a story via the screen. Its “Introduction” is filled with a collection of screenplay aphorisms that divide up McPhee's advice on how to discover and mine a successful idea into a full-fledged play (3-10). Such headers as “*Story* is about archetypes, not stereotypes” introduced me to the concept that my task was to find the universal appeal in Brooke's story while simultaneously centering the tale in its own “unique, culture-specific expression” (McPhee 4).

Essentially, how did Brooke's heroine Maria capture something worth saying across centuries and cultures? For me, the answer was simple—Maria appeals to women in the same way the gals of *Sex and the City* do. She is our naïve sister, chasing a dream of glitz and love that she does not even fully understand. And, of course, once she does,

she realizes it was not at all the “fairytale” she saw in her head. I do not know a woman who has lived through her twenties who has not had “Maria moments” or, at the very least, counseled her girlfriends through a few.

Yet, what about the second part of McPhee’s equation? Maria’s “culture-specific” is late Eighteenth Century London. And thus, another large question of screenplay adaptation, as opposed to “just” writing an original piece, loomed its head—do I keep the original setting or modernize (Seeger 8-9)? Once again, the answer for me was simple. I love the gowns and shoes and mile-high wigs of an Eighteenth Century period piece. But beyond my own personal aesthetic taste, I also took to heart McPhee’s advice: “You must shape your story in a way that both expresses your vision and satisfies the audience’s desires” (8). Given the success of such film adaptations as Sofia Coppola’s *Marie Antoinette* and Saul Dibb’s *The Duchess*, both of which won Academy Awards for costume design (“Marie,” *The Duchess*), I felt that modern audiences also found the extravagance of the Eighteenth Century world appealing.

In a world where the future Queen of England is praised for wearing a two-year old, off-the-rack dress for her official engagement pictures (Gosk), perhaps the opulence of Georgiana Spencer (*The Duchess*) spins a fantasy as captivating as Cinderella’s magical ball gown and glass slippers. In addition, it is in Maria’s “unique” space that her true “archetypal” self can emerge; we love her clothes and her hair and her fancy parties, but what we really love is that in the middle of this beautiful, shining world is a girl just like us. We are seduced by the Ton as much as Maria is; and for this reason, we embrace her through all her antics rather than snort with contempt at them. As McPhee writes, “The audience’s emotional involvement is held by the glue of empathy. If the writer fails

to fuse a bond between filmgoer and protagonist, we sit outside feeling nothing [. . . and] We empathize for very personal, if not egocentric, reasons” (141).

Using McPhee’s *Story* to grasp the core of the screenplay writing process, I then moved on to Seger’s text, a work that truly teaches *The Art of Adaptation*. In her introduction, Seger uses a wonderful analogy to capture the way in which one begins with a novel or play and renders it into a film:

The adapter is much like the sculptor Michelangelo, who when asked how he was able to carve such a beautiful angel replied, ‘The angel is caught inside the stone, I simply carve everything that isn’t the angel.’ The adaptor is sculpting out everything that isn’t drama, so the intrinsic drama contained within another medium remains. (2)

In order to “carve” out the film of *The Excursion* from its source material, I had to organize Brooke’s novel into an outline with a clear “beginning, middle, and end of a dramatic storyline” (Seger 3). I therefore turned to Seger’s fifth chapter entitled “Finding the Story,” in which I learned that screenplays have three acts. Act I serves primarily as exposition; “It introduces your characters. It establishes the problem” (Seger 82). Act II is where the “focal character” (in my case, Maria) engages with other characters in such a way that obstacles (and thus drama) are created for her; it is also where we watch her willingness to stay the course (and thus drama that she creates) (Seger 7, 83). Act III allows the audience to witness the results of actions taken in Act II; it is where we see “the scene (or scenes) at the end of the story that clarify that character has reached the goal, resolved the problem, or ended the particular journey” (Seger 83, 84).

This sort of act division is based upon a two-hour storyline time constraint with the commonly accepted method that a screenplay writer can “figure one minute of screen time to a page.” Thus, Act I equals 25-35 minutes of screen time or 25-35 pages of text; Act II should be 60 pages; Act III, “usually the most exciting,” is 20-30 pages (Seger 83). In order to organize a roughly 153-page novel into this type of framework, I had some key questions to answer. While it is obvious that Maria is the main character, I needed to clearly identify her goal and explain it within the first 20 or so pages of my work. After all, according to Seger’s basic formula, “Goal-oriented story lines are the easiest to adapt” (79). Once the main goal is identified, then the adaptation writer can simply work backwards through the source material with the achievement serving as the finale, the effort making up the film’s core, and the initial desire serving as “the catalyst” (Seger 79, 85). In the margins of my copy of Seger’s work, I wrote out, “What does Maria want?” Underneath this note, I scrawled, “Maria wants a rich, aristocratic husband and to produce her tragedy.”

Having come this far though, I wondered, via my margin notes, “What happens when the goal is not met? Or changes?” After all, Maria certainly has a “catalyst” for her goal in a convenient 200 pound inheritance (Brooke 9). Now our girl has the financial backing to integrate the Ton for a (brief) Season. And as the exploits of Brooke’s Book II-IV reveal (17-71), Maria certainly encounters obstacles aplenty in her efforts to achieve the goal that I identified. However, Maria does not land Melville or see her tragedy produced for the London stage—no coronet on her coach or third day’s profit for her (Brooke 80-83, 111). However, as I continued to plunge through Seger’s text, her next section seemed to solve this problem for me—“Look for a Journey,” announced the

heading. Seger writes, “Some story lines place their emphasis on the transformational journey of a character. The story comes from the journey rather than from defining a clear-cut goal” (81). Whereas Maria definitely has a goal that shaped Act I and Act II of my adaptation, it was in examining her “transformational journey” as a result of this goal that I was able to develop Act III. If the only thing Maria longs for is to have a title and hear applause, I am not sure that any audience member, including myself, would like her very much. It is in her ultimate realization that it is true virtue (even if it comes with a title or inheritance) that is attractive and that it is in the love of family and friends where the most worthwhile reception is felt that Maria’s “problem is solved” (Brooke 139-143, 147-153, Seger 84).

Once I understood how to organize Maria’s tale according to a three-act structure, which also provided me with a basic page/minute count per act, I had to figure out how to smoothly transition between these acts (Seger 85). According to Seger, such “transition scenes” are also referred to as “hinge scenes,” a diction that more clearly illustrates their purpose. Each of the screenplay’s two “hinge scenes” will essentially open a (door) frame of a new area of action (Seger 86). And the transition itself will be dynamic (Seger 85); it will need to involve Maria doing something. The opening of my adaptation includes the necessary exposition to establish who Maria and other characters are and her primary goal, as well as the secondary or “B story” (Seger 90) of Louisa and Montague. Thus my first “hinge scene” would need to propel Maria from Belfont and country life to merry (and dangerous) London. And what sends her on her way can easily be found in Part I, Chapter VII of Brooke’s text; having inherited adequate funds, she must now find

the right time, place, and argument to convince her uncle to allow for her departure (10-11).

However, I quickly realized the truth of Seger's statement that "Such [hinge] scenes won't always exist in the original material; you may have to create them" (86). While my transition was there, it consisted of a slim four-paragraph chapter that is primarily made up of narration. Brooke even begins this section with "To recount Maria's timid efforts to unveil her purpose to her uncle [. . .] would be exceedingly uninteresting to the reader" (10). But this was the task at hand, so I as outlined my adaptation, I conceived and ultimately wrote a breakfast scene in which Maria "proposed the journey with hesitation, and her uncle [. . .] reluctantly gave his consent" (Brooke 11). In this one scene, I was able to build in information regarding Mrs. Merrick; and through small visual details, add further to the characterization of Col. Dormer and Louisa.

It is in this latter use of visual imagery to replace narration that I repeatedly found myself constructing original sections, if not entirely new scenes. I could often use Brooke's narration as dialogue, a method that also helped me to format the diction and syntax of the adaptation's dialogue to mimic that of its setting's time period. In addition, Brooke's heavy use of diatribe is also one reason I enhanced Mrs. Herbert's role, turning her into a Brooke stand-in of sorts, who offers not only clarifying voice over narration but also social commentary. However, with all those elements working for me, I still continually saw the truth in Seger's statement that "Fiction uses words to tell a story, describe characters, and build ideas. Films use images and actions. They are essentially different mediums that resist each other as often as they cooperate" (27). I would have to

do some original writing in order to provide Brooke's material with enough momentum to successfully translate onto the silver screen.

One example of such an original scene occurs at the very start of the adaptation with the funeral of Maria and Louisa's parents, as well as Melville's mother. No such scene actually exists in *The Excursion*; Brooke simply tells us the twin's parents are deceased and they are raised by their uncle (5-6) while Melville's mother is no longer living and his father is the dominant (and evil) influence of his life (23-24, 61). While this detail seems fairly small, it also is one with a profound effect on the development of these characters. All three children suffer the loss of at least one parent, yet their subsequent lives are so very different, mostly due to the type of guardian to whom they are ultimately entrusted. Left to men to raise alone, these three characters showcase in this one common element the Eighteenth Century "motherless child" motif (Slagle), as well as Brooke's own opinion of the "noble" man versus the military man (her preference being obvious).

The audience, therefore, begins at the beginning with Maria, Louisa, and Melville. By watching these three small children at their parents' funerals, "the audience should be able to understand much of [the] film by looking at the moving pictures" (Seeger 107). Maria and Louisa are twins, upper middle class, and commended to a man, who may not necessarily be the most advanced in his knowledge of childcare, but who also loves and desires to protect his little charges to the best of his ability. In contrast, Melville is an only child of the nobility and left to a Peer, who is not only a callous, opportunistic womanizer, but who will also teach his son to be just like him. In addition, in the one

swift look which Maria gives Melville the audience sees early on her interest in the Ton and its members' disregard of her.

Opening my own writing this way enabled me to grasp from the very beginning of the adaptation the importance of supplementing Brooke's text with additional elements. One such addition that I knew I wanted to include from the start of my writing process (it is indeed listed at the very top of my original outline) was modern music. Again, I turned to Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*, a film that I dearly love. Having read Antonia Fraser's *Marie Antoinette: The Journey*, from which Coppola creates her adaptation, I felt that the film captured much of the essence of Marie Antoinette's opulence, cultural disconnect, and simultaneous sweet naiveté through the layering of pop music over scenes rich in Eighteenth Century dress and customs. As the people of her kingdom are literally starving, Marie Antoinette shops for gown after gown, tries on shoe after shoe, piles on even more wigs, and munches on petit fours and champagne—all while Bow Wow Wow's "I Want Candy" plays cheerfully in the background (*Marie*).

But while I knew I wanted to include a similar element within my own work, I also did not simply want to copy Coppola's technique. Rather, I decided upon a use of music, primarily in Act II of my screenplay, that would be a combination of Eighteenth Century baroque pieces and contemporary music of the 1970s and 1980s. I wished to use the musical score as a way to draw the audience further in to a scene while also offering further characterization. For example, I use a baroque version of "Witchy Woman" to introduce Lady Hardy in order to have the audience "tune their ear" to the implications of this background element. One of the reasons Maria so captivates her audience is because we see clearly what she fails to recognize. As Lady Hardy takes center stage, we see

(and hear) immediately what she is while Maria remains as ignorant of the world around her as if she was locked in a sound proof chamber. In addition, I deliberately chose to use mostly songs from the 1980s in order to draw a comparison between a world in our near past and the Eighteenth Century. Both periods were known for their over-the-top lifestyle in such areas as fashion and consumption of goods. Thus the music further enhances the archetype or universality of Maria's story.

Having made my way through Seger's Chapter 5, "Finding the Story," I discovered the need for and set about constructing original scenes and details. However, as I encountered her Chapter 6, "Choosing the Characters," I also realized that "much of the beginning work of adaptation demands choosing, cutting, and combining characters" (Seger 118-119). Just as I had added, I must now take away. In order to complete this task, Seger recommended that I come up with a "plumb line" of character purpose within the story. While characters within the original novel may enrich aspects such as setting or social commentary, they do little to actually move the plot along (Seger 122). To help developing screenwriters like myself decide which characters actually fulfill the latter objective, Seger proposes a four-part test of sorts. If a character can perform at least one of the following roles, then he or she can stay: "The Storytelling Function," "Helping to Reveal Main Characters," "Talking About, Revealing, or Embodying the Theme," or "Adding Color and Texture" (Seger 122-124). However, Seger recommends that a cut in the form of composite may also need to occur if multiple characters "are serving the same function" (122).

With all of this information in mind, I actually cut very few characters. Maria and her family as well as Melville and his circle remain intact as most of these individuals,

including various servants, perform one of the aforementioned roles. Yet, from the onset of my project, I was not quite sure what to do with Mr. Hammond. Brooke interjects Mr. Hammond into Maria's life as a guide to the theatrical world who quickly becomes her overall savior from herself (Brooke 80-83, 101, 121-122). But to have him come into the screenplay and take Maria's tragedy to Drury Lane to shop around seemed distracting for a modern audience. Recent successful Eighteenth Century period pieces focus primarily on relationships ("Jane," "Marie," *The Duchess*); this is indeed how they manage to find McPhee's archetypal connection (4). Simply put, the audience wants to see Maria chase the bad guy, get rejected, and end up with the good guy.

Yet her writing "career" does enhance the film's "color and texture" (Seger 124) as it further enriches her characterization as a naïve young girl in big, bad London. However, I asked myself, "Do not Mrs. Herbert and Lady Sophia provide the salvation from the City in both its human and literary forms?" After all, Maria's tragedy really operates in the space of a false savior—she depends on an incredibly bad piece of literature to pay an extravagant debt (Brooke 65). The means to do this (the tragedy) are "culture-specific" (McPhee 4), but Maria's belief system is very identifiable with modern audiences—most people, particularly young people, have counted on a check they do not have to pay a bill they do. Therefore, I wanted to leave Maria's writing in; but if I did not want to attempt a specific, and thus complicated, trip into the world of Eighteenth Century London stage productions and Mrs. Herbert and her mother-in-law were already whisking Maria out of the Ton's snare, did I need Mr. Hammond? The answer for me was a resounding, "No."

In addition, as a modern day woman I was a little leery of a plot detail that included a man having to step in and save my heroine. As my musical choices highlight in a closing scene in which Mrs. Herbert and Lady Sophia discuss a way Maria can work to pay off her debt, “Sisters Are Doin’ It For Themselves” (“YouTube”). In order to bring a more feminist feel into the film, I replaced Mr. Hammond with two female characters, who now not only provide the traditional Eighteenth Century moral guidance for the heroine but also the more contemporary financial direction.

According to the University of Texas at Austin’s article “Feminism in Film Studies,” “The growing female presence in the film industry was seen as a positive step toward [. . .] drawing attention to feminist issues and putting forth alternative, more true-to-life views of women.” Francis Brooke herself was a strong woman succeeding in the male-dominated entertainment industry of her day (Backscheider and Cotton xxxi, xxxvi-xxxviii); it therefore seems just and right to have her narrator stand-in Mrs. Herbert “save” Maria, as opposed to some fairy godfather-like character. However, this adaptation is still “culture-specific” (McPhee 4) and so Maria does marry a Prince Charming of sorts at the end. But even the good men of both the novel (and thus the adaptation) are really always on the edge of the story. As shown from the adaptation’s opening image of twin girls, a female doubling of the quiet and gentle with the adventurous and creative, it is a text predominantly about all kinds of women. And thus for the majority of the adaptation, be they good girls or bad, women take center stage. I think Brooke would approve.

Of course, once I made all of the important decisions about plot, character development, music, and a multitude of other things, I still did not know how to actually

write a screenplay. As an English undergraduate and graduate student, I have written papers and papers and papers. I have even published a poem or two. But no amount of MLA background knowledge or poetic license was going to help me format all of my ideas from my outline into my chosen genre. Fortunately for me, just as I was about to set out to actually begin writing my screenplay, I turned 30 (this is not the good part), and I received a wonderful card and gift from my mother. My birthday card was filled with sentimental remembrances about my childhood and praise for the grace of my adulthood; I was actually a little weepy at the end of reading my mother's words. I then opened my gift bag to discover a text entitled *Your Screenplay Sucks! 100 Ways to Make It Great*, and I burst out laughing and remembered once again why I love my mom so much.

While the title of William M. Akers's work may always inspire a giggle or two, it is actually one of the most helpful texts I consulted in terms of formatting the adaptation according to the film industry's specifications. Once I had my outline down, I rarely looked at McPhee's or Seger's works again; however, I consulted Akers on a daily basis. It was from his work that I learned the basic jargon of screenplay writing; I now understand that I wrote my work in the accepted "Warner Bros. style" and my text consists of sluglines, descriptions, character names, and dialogue (Akers 138-140). I learned how to properly indicate such elements as flashbacks and voice overs (Akers 139, 143). But perhaps what made Akers's work so valuable to me was his inclusion of "the Tennessee Screenwriting Association's website." The site includes instructions on how to set up a Microsoft Word Document as a "Screenwriting Processor" (Akers 154). All I had to do was follow the instructions, and my adaptation now looks like any other script

currently being reviewed in Hollywood; and I did not have to purchase any pricey software to do it.

Lastly, Akers offered me some key advice that served as a reminder of why I began this project in the first place. He comments, “educate yourself in this wonderful storytelling medium,” and one of his prime methods of self-teaching is through observation. In other words, “your screenplay sucks because *you don’t watch movies*” (Akers 130). But I do watch movies—lots of them; I even have a Netflix subscription, as Akers recommends (130). However, in the process of writing my own screenplay, this very simple advice, which on the surface I appeared to be following already, reminded me of my original introduction to Brooke’s text. After all, the whole reason I decided to write this adaptation is because my class had watched several different adaptations of Eighteenth Century novels and found the lack of *The Excursion* in the genre to be sad and in need of remedy.

This memory then raised a few questions: “What was so special about those various novel adaptations? As a student of Eighteenth Century British literature, how did being a part of those films’ audiences enrich my experience with the text? And how did those films stand alone, apart from their original written work?” The idea to which I kept returning in my answer to all those questions was the humor of these works, both in film and in print. I love, what I term, the “smart funny” of the Eighteenth Century and how through clever adaptation it can be captured on screen. Having attempted to grasp *Tristram Shandy* as a text, I still think that the theme-capturing achieved by its film version creates one of the funniest movies I have ever seen (*Tristram*). Of course, you have to read *Tristram Shandy* to get that; but sometimes, a big laugh is worth a little

sacrifice. In addition, I like the use of color and film speed in the film adaptation of *Joseph Andrews* to show the outrageous, over-the-top silliness of the hierarchal society. And I liked that the Moll Flanders of film talks directly to me just as Defoe's first person account speaks to me from the page. Throughout the film, her blunt assessments sally forth an honesty that is brutally sharp and funny (*The Fortune*).

Having strolled down a memory's lane of film review, I then, of course, had another question: "How then does this affect my screenplay?" I find Francis Brooke's text to be very "smart funny." Her tongue-in-cheek narration is truly delightful, but as I mentioned earlier, I needed things to happen, not be described (Seger 27). Yet one of the things that made Brooke's original work so funny was this running commentary. Thus with Akers, Seger, and my own review of other Eighteenth Century films all crashing in on each other, I moved Mrs. Herbert out of her minor character role in the text to serve as a narrator. Initially, she works primarily in voice overs—this technique is established from the second scene in the film in which she actually introduces herself through voice over. Therefore, the audience knows from the onset what she looks like, who she is, and the additional role she will be playing throughout the film. As the screenplay develops, her role as narrator becomes more visual. She begins with a couple of split screen cameos in which she speaks directly to the camera, à la Moll Flanders (*The Fortune*). However, she also has moments in which she actually enters scenes to express her opinion.

From slamming the door on Melville's seduction of Dorignon to appearing in jewelry (a true cameo) to materializing in a mirror, Mrs. Herbert and her interpretation of Maria's failures pop up throughout Act II. She preserves Brooke's commentary while

simultaneously representing the judgment that the audience projects onto Maria. The visual aspect of this choice also lends the film a taste of the theatrical in the tradition of something like film versions of *Joseph Andrews* or *Tristram Shandy*. In addition, it allows narration to become dynamic and exciting—the audience must ask themselves, “When and how will Mrs. Herbert appear again?” It therefore seems a logical conclusion to make the “hinge scene” (Seeger 86) from Act II to Act III the actual appearance of Mrs. Herbert in London. As Maria’s very real savior, she is no longer relegated to an outer world but has become the primary influence of the actual space of the film.

So having made all of these decisions, from what to do with Mr. Hammond, Mrs. Herbert, and most importantly, Maria, I plugged away for two years writing this script. It has truly been a labor of love; at least most of the time, I enjoyed the creative outlet that its construction provided. But there is now more to it for me than just my master’s thesis, the latter comment being a fine example of understatement. As I finished my work on Act I of the adaptation, I met with Dr. Barker and Dr. Slagle. These consultations became a regular and helpful part of my writing process, but this meeting stands out for me because of a new angle it presented. After giving notes and discussing the development of Act II, Dr. Barker casually asked if I had considered selling my screenplay. And I answered, “Well, no.” Actually, the thought of doing anything with it professionally had never occurred to me. Being now a good chunk into the process, I thought to myself, “Sylvester Stallone writes screenplays. Ben Affleck writes screenplays. What do I know about the movie industry?”

But Dr. Barker continued, suggesting that the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), for example, might be interested in my work. Dr. Slagle noted that the BBC and

the Public Broadcast Service (PBS) were always looking for new material in the “Jane Austen-esque” manner. So being on a break from both work and school shortly after this meeting, I did a little research and discovered the “BBC Writers Room.” The website cheerfully proclaims the following:

BBC writersroom is always on the lookout for fresh, new, talented writers for a changing Britain. When we find them, we do everything we can to get their voice heard and their work produced for BBC film, TV and radio – for drama, comedy, and children’s programmes.

It goes on to explain how to submit materials and promises to “read all unsolicited scripts for BBC Films, TV Drama, Children's Drama, TV Comedy, Radio Entertainment and Radio Drama” (“BBC”).

And this is where my story ends, for now. Following the completion of my oral defense process and completion of my MA exam, I plan to submit my screenplay to the BBC and possibly some other producers. In some ways, I have become a little like my heroine, occasionally indulging in a fantasy about my screenplay appearing to rave film reviews. But I also hope that I have perhaps learned more from the lady to whom I am so humbly indebted. Francis Brooke led a very different life from what she thought and what everyone else presumed it would be. Despite setbacks, she continued to create and persevere and to let people know it (Backscheider and Cotton xxxi, xxxvi-xxxviii). She lived out the key phrase of Col. Dormer’s final speech in *The Excursion*; I can only hope to do the same: ““We will build a little, plant a great deal, and above all, garden to infinity”” (Brooke 152).

CHAPTER 2

SCREENPLAY ADAPTATION

ACT I

EXT. LONDON CEMETERY MIDMORNING

A soft rain FALLS in the cemetery as two separate graveside services come to an end. Mourners move away from both parties to walk off or climb into coaches. The families of the deceased remain at the graves with two to three strangers.

At one side of the cemetery are MARIA and LOUISA, 5, with COL. DORMER, 37. The twins stand on either side of their uncle, who holds their hands as they all look on at two freshly dug graves. The girls, dressed alike, are the same size and height but not identical. Maria, clearly the more active of the two, is a curly-headed brunette with snapping brown eyes. In contrast, Louisa has a fair complexion, auburn hair and pale blue eyes. Col. Dormer is a solid man's man with broad shoulders and large hands that swallow up those of the two girls. He would clearly be comfortable on the battlefield but exudes a strong sense of sadness and compassion from his eyes.

Adjacent to this service stands MELVILLE, 7. Slender and almost slightly effeminate in appearance, Melville has dirty blonde hair and hazel eyes; he has a beauty that actually surpasses that of the two girls. Not crying but distressed by his mother's death, Melville stands next to her grave and glances at the girls and looks back toward his father. LORD CLAREMONT, 37, approaches a female "mourner." Possessing the same build as his son, Claremont is a striking if not handsome man. He is intelligent and cynical in the extreme; he is a womanizer.

FEMALE MOURNER

I am so sorry for your loss, my Lord.

LORD CLAREMONT

Thank you, Madame. I know her Ladyship would have appreciated your condolences in this time of grave sorrow.

Lord Claremont guides the female mourner toward a waiting coach, sliding an ungloved hand casually down her back before handing her into the coach. Claremont glances back at his son and nods his head in the direction of following coach. Melville crosses the cemetery and climbs in. Maria looks from her uncle to Melville entering the coach; Melville does not see her stare. Louisa glances at her sister but doesn't follow her gaze—she simply waits till Maria turns her eyes back to Louisa.

Col. Dormer waits for the nobility to leave, picks up Louisa and takes Maria's hand. They climb into a much smaller coach and depart in the opposite direction.

EXT. GARDEN, LARGE RUTLAND ESTATE MILD SEPT AFTERNOON

Soft light bathes the rear view of a beautiful country estate and English gardens. Young people, some couples and some singles, are playing games, sipping drinks, and eating snacks on the open lawn area. Louisa, now 17, watches a game of pall mall. Players include her chief object of interest, MONTAGUE, a tall, graceful, athletic young man with an olive complexion, dark eyes and shining chestnut hair. Possessing the easy mien and unconstrained deportment of a gentleman, it is obvious Montague is attracted/devoted to Louisa. Maria, now 17, sits slightly apart from the group and scribbles away in a leather bound journal.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

It is here that our story really begins. You may recognize the twins, Louisa and Maria Villiers, daughters of the country gentleman and his wife whom we buried a brief time ago. You won't find the other motherless youth, young Melville, or his charming (slight edge/sarcastic) father in this scene. But we will meet up with them again soon enough.

MRS. HERBERT, 25, a young, beautiful widow of fashion and unblemished character, rich, good-humored, lively, dissipated, and a little capricious, makes her way across the lawn toward the party. While petite, her presence is strong and she is clearly in control of this little coterie. She makes a fairly direct line toward Maria.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Oh yes, there I am. I was just finishing my summer stay with a family acquaintance. I met and admired both of Col. Dormer's nieces soon after my arrival, taking an amazing fancy to Maria. In fact, if it hadn't been that this girl was indeed fifty times handsomer than myself, I would have immediately invited her to winter with me in London. But, well, the science of light and shade is as necessary to a study to a beauty as to a painter.

Mrs. Herbert reaches Maria, lights for a moment beside her, and whispers something in her ear; both women laugh and lean over the pages of the journal.

LOUISA

Girls, girls, come join us!

FELLOW MALE ATTENDEE 1

(teasingly)

Miss Villiers is too busy with her tragedies for fun.

Mrs. Herbert whispers something else to Maria while pushing the journal from her lap. The two women rise together, link arms around each others' waists and move toward the group of players.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Had Maria only communicated her plans to me, I could have . . . but I guess she didn't really know, well, anything, at this point.

The young men begin another game of pall mall with the ladies placing bets on who shall win the match. Maria good naturedly bets on the youth who heckled her moments before.

FELLOW MALE ATTENDEE 1

Miss Villiers, I shall not
disappoint your decision to
abandon your genius for revelry.

Fellow Male Attendee 1 badly miscalculates his shot, curses under his breath, and turns to face the ladies again with a smile. The other gentlemen all teasingly jeer from the sidelines as the young man executes a graceful bow. Maria hands over her money to Mrs. Herbert.

MARIA

(Laughing, teasingly)
How . . . tragic?

FELLOW MALE ATTENDEE 1

You are the expert, having
'Lisp'd in numbers' since
infancy.

MARIA

Why, thank you, sir. Perhaps,
in my expertise, I should break
through my veil of modesty and
take the field to show you how
to win a lady's bet.

FELLOW MALE ATTENDEE 1

Place your dependence on your
fable, Miss V!

MRS. HERBERT

Well played, after all, sir.

EXT. BELFONT GARDEN EVENING SAME DAY

Maria and Louisa return from Mrs. Herbert's party and enter the garden. They begin to approach Col. Dormer; but seeing that he is busy with his plants, the girls change course and head hand-in-hand to the terrace wall. The coach-and-six of a LOCAL LADY approaches; CLOSE UP of coronet on the door of the coach. Hearing it, Maria breaks from her sister and walks swiftly to the wall, leaning over to catch a view of the coach as it sails by. Louisa walks over at much more leisurely pace and leans against the wall as she looks off in the direction of Montague's father's estate. Montague can be glimpsed on horseback in the distance; he leans over to speak with a tenant farmer while his father's impressive mansion looms in the background.

MARIA

Don't you think, Louisa? That .
. .

LOUISA

Hmmmm?

MARIA

That there is something or
someone that is . . . more . .
.

LOUISA

More than-

The supper-bell rings, and Louisa turns in the direction of the house. She begins to move and looks back expectantly at her twin.

COL. DORMER (O.S.)

Girls, girls!

Maria looks toward the coach, which is now far removed on a distant hillside road. She slowly climbs down from her perch, takes her sister's outstretched hand, and both girls quicken their pace to obey the summons of their uncle and the bell.

INT. MARIA AND LOUISA'S BEDROOM NIGHT

Louisa sleeps peacefully beside her sister while Maria tosses and turns in her sleep. INTERCUT SCENES.

INT. LONDON BALLROOM WINTER NIGHT

A large crowd of aristocrats participate in a ball while a large coach similar to the one in the prior scene passes through the snow peacefully falling outside. Maria enters the large double doors of the ballroom in a beautiful, pale pink ball gown.

FOOTMAN

Miss Maria Villiers!

Instantly a YOUNG NOBLEMAN, whose face is never visible to the camera, enters the scene and makes his way swiftly to Maria. He bows low over her hand as Maria curtseys to him. Then, he sweeps her up in his arms and twirls her around the ballroom. As he spins faster and faster, a series of images burst upon the screen in rapid succession as MUSIC PERFORMED, "Suite in C Minor" (Gavotte) by Recorder and Classical Guitar, SPEEDS UP to an incomprehensible whine—Maria arriving on the arm of young nobleman at some sort of party (CLOSE UP of coronet on coach door), Maria's wedding to young nobleman, young nobleman introducing Maria to theatre owner, Maria's tragedy on the stage with a slightly pregnant Maria watching from a box with her "husband," and Maria sweating profusely on bloody sheets while holding her just born child as her "husband" looks on. Each image will become more and more garish as they progress until the last which will be deliberately and harshly grotesque.

INT. MARIA AND LOUISA'S BEDROOM SAME NIGHT

Maria, drenched in sweat and very flushed, awakes and sits upright in the bed. She LOOKS DIRECTLY at the camera and smiles with a look of sheer ecstasy running across her face. Louisa continues to sleep peacefully beside her.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

I know, I know what you're thinking . . . In a just a few more hours, Maria will get up, new-born, determined to winter in London, the only place where beauty and merit are allowed their sterling value.

INT. ATTIC, BELFONT FALL MORNING

Maria sits at a large dusty window; she is surrounded by trunks, crates and discarded paintings. She glances briefly at one painting showing the twins as children with their mother and father in a pastoral scene. A sharp SOUND OF LAUGHTER from outside causes her to look out the window. INTERCUT SCENES.

EXT. GARDEN, BELFONT SAME MORNING

Louisa makes her way over to the same fence where the girls stood yesterday; she greets and laughs with Montague, who is on horseback. Both young people glance at Col. Dormer when Louisa laughs a little too loudly, but the Col. continues to work in his garden completely oblivious to his niece. Col Dormer's perennials such as "wind flower" and "Jupiter's beard" will help establish time frame of setting. Montague hands a package of letters to Louisa.

INT. ATTIC, BELFONT SAME MORNING

Maria looks down at the books in her lap—her leather bound journal and a copy of pastoral poems. The journal is open and Maria returns to writing in it.

LOUISA (O.S)

Maria, Maria . . . Maria, where
are you?

Louisa's FOOTSTEPS HEARD on the stairs to the attic.

MARIA

Here, sister.

Louisa enters the attic, sees Maria working and hesitates just inside the doorway.

MARIA

Are you my muse? Come in, come
in.

LOUISA

I am afraid I am just a courier
today—

MARIA

(smiles warmly at her sister) I
saw the courier--right on time,
as always.

LOUISA

Ah, he . . . pray sister, open
this.

Blushing profusely, Louisa hands her sister a letter and waits expectantly. Her desire to see what her sister has received is not one of nosiness but rather of simple kinship. The girls share everything; for Louisa to leave would have seemed incredibly odd to Maria. Their ease with each other is palpable.

MARIA

A curious nymph rather than a muse then. (Reading the name on the letter simultaneously with)

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Mrs. Elizabeth Hammond, an old friend of . . .

MARIA

Of mother's. (Opens letter. Reads.) Louisa! A legacy!

Maria runs to her sister as she dumps her journal and poetry book out of her lap and into the floor. She hands her sister the letter and is almost jumping up and down in her excitement.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

A legacy of two hundred pounds, which she was to employ in whatever manner she thought proper, without accounting to her guardian. I mean, really?

MARIA

I'm going now! As soon as I can assume sufficient courage to ask . . . to disclose to Uncle my wish, I'm going to London. Louisa, we could winter in sty(le) . . .

Louisa breaks eye contact with her sister, glances at the childhood portrait and stares at the floor.

MARIA

No, you are right. We should not leave uncle in absolute solitude. Do not worry; I shall undertake the journey alone.

Maria kisses her sister quickly on the cheek and pulls her behind her as she leaves the attic.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Had Maria actually finished asking concurrence with her sister, she had probably refused. In short, Louisa loved; Maria's hour was not yet come; a distinction which will sufficiently account for the different manner in which they had been affected by the brilliant object which had banished peace from the bosom of the latter.

INT. BELFONT DINING ROOM WINTER MORNING

Col. Dormer, Maria and Louisa sit a modest dining room table—one twin on either side of their uncle who is at the head of the table. Maria's journal lies open beside her on the table as she breakfasts. Col. Dormer reads a book on gardening while Louisa contentedly chews her breakfast. Some correspondence sits at Col. Dormer's elbow.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

To recount all of Maria's timid efforts to unveil her purpose to her uncle, and to observe how often her heart failed her, would be exceedingly uninteresting to you. Suffice it to say, that, after several weeks irresolution, during which the agitation of her mind exceedingly affected her temper, Maria was presented with an opportunity to propose her journey.

In his excitement over some horticultural fact discovered in his reading, Col. Dormer knocks a few of the letters at his elbow into the floor. Louisa smiles at her sister and reaches down to retrieve them.

LOUISA

Uncle, you haven't opened the letters that Char . . . Mr. Montague brought to us yesterday.

COL. DORMER

What, my dear? Oh, yes.

Col. Dormer flips his book upside down and goes to place it down on the table to save his place. Not observing where he is actually putting it, he almost smacks it down in the middle of his toast with jam. Maria smoothly intercedes, takes the book before it hits the plate of food, slips a piece of paper in it, closes it and sets it down well away from the breakfast dishes. Oblivious to all of this, Col. Dormer picks up the first letter and opens it.

COL. DORMER

Ah, Mrs. Merrick, a favorite servant of your late mother and a woman of worthy character, has just taken a house in Berners-street . . . Oh, but we can't be of much help to her there.

MARIA

Berners-street . . . it is the next street to Mrs. Herbert.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Unfortunately, geographical accessibility is not a guarantee for the brilliant future for which her heart now so ardently panted.

LOUISA

What is her inquiry, Uncle?

COL. DORMER

(still scanning the letter)
Hmmm, what? Oh, she entreats for a recommendation of some single lady to hire her best apartments, fitted up with the utmost elegance, she assures.

Maria glances at her sister and nervously closes her journal. Mrs. Hebert describes the scene that unfolds in the voice over below: Maria hands her uncle the letter about the legacy, he smiles kindly at her and reads it over. She speaks to him, and he listens but shakes his head disapprovingly as she continues to build up steam. Maria continues to talk on and on and tears fall as she becomes more and more pleading; her uncle is now clearly uncomfortable and her sister has jumped in on Maria's side, rushing to Maria's chair and putting her arm around her. When Louisa begins to squeeze out sympathy tears, their frustrated uncle relents, pats Maria's hand, rereads the letter, and agrees.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Here she goes . . . oh, she knew he would remonstrate, but she had previously resolved it should be in vain; she was clear his disapprobation would be only temporary. After all, he would be filled with rapture when he should see her return to Belfont, after an absence of two or three months, with a ducal coronet on her coach; an event of which she had not the remotest doubt.

Maria jumps up, almost knocking her sister down, and rushes to hug her uncle. Louisa, happy that her family is happy again, joins in the hugging. Maria pulls her chair up closer to her Uncle as she sits back down, kissing his cheek again before taking her seat. Louisa follows her sister's lead and resumes her seat at the breakfast table.

MARIA

Do not worry, Uncle, do not worry--you have read too many novels.

COL. DORMER

It is not the Mr. B's of the world who worry me, nor am I fearful of some fat country housekeeper locking you up as a savory treat for her master . . . all right, niece, you may go.

(MORE)

COL. DORMER (CONT'D)

But I caution you against the
real hazards of that world—
worthless acquaintance,
unmerited calumny, and ruinous
expense. The dangers of our
fictions are generally
imaginary, but the latter evils
are all too real.

Maria listens a little impatiently to this last speech,
leaping from her seat, knocking her journal in the floor
and embracing and kissing her uncle on the cheek as he
finishes. Col. Dormer is clearly pleased with the effect
of his permission.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

After many similar
conversations, in which this
amiable old man drew a faithful
picture of the various evils to
which Maria was going
unnecessarily to expose herself;
and which she heard with the
attention generally given by
presumptuous, believing,
unsuspecting youth to the
prudent lessons of wary
experience, her journey was
fixed for Tuesday the 10th of
January.

EXT. FRONT OF HOUSE, BELFONT EARLY MORNING

Col. Dormer, Maria and Louisa stand in front of the house
on a crisp, cold January morning. There is no snow
falling, but a heavy frost covers the yard and the bleak,
pale sunlight does nothing to dispel it.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

And the 10th arrived and still
held Maria in possession of her
uncle's consent. And while his
(MORE)

MRS. HERBERT (CONT'D)

arguments appeared to have some weight, she was predetermined not to be convinced by them. Such was her knowledge of the world, that she thought herself secure from its attacks by simply resolving not to merit them.

Col. Dormer's post-chaise approaches the house. And the ancient footman JOHN loads Maria's trunk onto it. John is a thin, wiry man who is easily pushing into his late 70s. He can barely load Maria's trunk. He is also hard of hearing and fairly nearsighted.

Louisa starts to speak and cannot. She embraces her sister; both girls cling to each other for a moment with Maria breaking apart from the hug and allowing her uncle to lead her to the chaise.

COL. DORMER

My dear child, as I cannot prevent your embarking on the tempestuous ocean of the world, I have only this to add; when beat by the storm, remember you have a safe port always within reach.

Uncle and niece embrace and Col. Dormer gently kisses Maria's cheek before handing her in to the chaise.

COL. DORMER

And I am sending John with you .
. . John, John, JOHN!

John is still struggling with the trunk. He finally gets it securely on the chaise and actually hears Col. Dormer calling him and rushes to the chaise door, where he attempts a graceful bow that becomes almost painful to watch.

COL. DORMER

Ah, yes, John. I am sending John with you to be a captain to your odyssey.

MARIA

Thank you, Uncle. And do not worry! I promise to make no new acquaintance to whom I am not expressly introduced by Mrs. Herbert.

Col. Dormer kisses Maria's hand once more and lets it go. He walks back over and puts a comforting arm around Louisa, whose tears are beginning to fall. The chaise drives off.

LOUISA

We must listen to Maria, Uncle, and not worry. Mrs. Herbert is very attached to her; it is an immense advantage to have such a friend to consult on every occasion . . . a friend in possession of general esteem . . . able to introduce her with éclat in the best company.

COL. DORMER

Yes, yes, and John is a man of great faithfulness. And, of course, Mrs. Merrick is a good woman.

LOUISA

Really, this excursion will only amuse Maria and perhaps even improve her.

COL. DORMER

She may dissipate part or perhaps all of her legacy.

LOUISA

But, really, what further ill consequence could occur?

The pair turns and heads back into the house. They pass into the garden. Col. Dormer inspects flower beds while Louisa casts a tender look in the direction of Montague's estate.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)
Louisa wants that question to
remain in the rhetorical.

INT. CHAISE ON ROAD FROM BELFONT TO STILTON MORNING

A CLOSE-UP of Maria's face, covered in tears, fills the screen. She looks down; the SCREEN SHOWS her hand holding a miniature painting of the twins as small girls, probably painted around the time of their parents' deaths. She lowers the fore-glass of the chaise as if to yell instructions to the driver. As she does so, the same Local Lady's coach that she saw before passes her chaise on the road. Maria catches a glimpse of the coronet on the door of the coach. Instantly, a 20 second whirlwind of her "DREAM SEQUENCE" WHIZZES ON SCREEN. She draws up the glass.

Split Screen (Horizontal): Mrs. Herbert, preparing her toilette, APPEARS as the screen slides horizontally into two separate divisions.

MRS. HERBERT
Her sister's attention, her
uncle's accumulated kindness,
the silent language of her own
heart, every whisper of
discretion, pictures drawn by
Truth . . . all of it, faded
away in a heartbeat of mingled
regret and expectation as
Maria's chaise flew along with a
velocity almost equal to her
impatience.

Mrs. Herbert's SCREEN SLIDES UP AND OUT as she completes her last line. She TURNS BACK to the task applying her make-up as she slides out of sight. Scene appears to MOVE IN FAST FORWARD as the chaise "flies" along the road to Stilton. John attempts to run by the coach, but at one point, it must stop and actually pick him up so he can ride beside the driver.

EXT. INN AT BIGGLESWADE AFTERNOON

Maria and John arrive at the inn. Maria exits the chaise as John, wig askew and stockings crumpled, hands her out of the chaise. John's face is heavily smudged with dirt and grime from the road, which emphasizes his wrinkles. Maria is looking around the front yard of the inn as she steps down.

MARIA

John, we will rest here momentarily before making our way to London. We should easily get in before nightfall.

JOHN

Of course, Madam. Will you be taking tea now?

Maria turns to John on this question, a response on her lips. John smiles gently, revealing that the grit of the road is actually in his teeth. He gives a slight bow and his wig falls in the dirt at his feet. He is clearly exhausted.

MARIA

John, we will rest here for the night. We can go to London in the morning just as well.

JOHN

(retrieving wig and standing up)
Of course, Madam. Will you be taking tea, then?

Maria smiles faintly and nervously at the footman and makes her way into the inn. John pulls up his stockings, which really does nothing to help the situation, un-straps Maria's valise from the chaise, and hobbles inside the inn.

INT. INN EVENING

During Mrs. Herbert's V.O. INTERCUT SCENES, Maria dines at the inn with John, still fairly disheveled but always devoted, waiting upon her. Maria writes in her journal in bed and then tosses and turns in her sleep. On Mrs. Herbert's final line, a CLOSE-UP of Maria's face shows her finding peace in her dreams, with the CAMERA SWOOPING AWAY to a scene of a dark, moonless night outside the inn on the last clause.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

In compassion to her uhhh,
footman, Maria, her heart
dancing with hope, slept at
Biggleswade that night and
counted each moment with
impatience. She got into London
the next afternoon without
meeting with any adventure
worthy of history to recount.
The scene of happiness her
ambitions promised her was about
to shift into the dreary void
only reality can provide.

ACT II

EXT. MODEST BRICK HOME LONDON EARLY AFTERNOON

Maria's chaise pulls up in front of Mrs. Merrick's home in London. MRS. MERRICK is SHOWN PEEKING THROUGH UPSTAIRS WINDOW in obvious excited anticipation of her guest.

Maria is handed out of her carriage and looks around at the fashionable people and coaches filling the sidewalks and streets. The sounds of the street and the people are "MUTED OUT" BY SONG, "Sonata in G Major" (Locatelli) performed by a Transverse Flute and Classical Guitar. For a moment, Maria has an almost girlish look of excitement on her face, which she obviously suppresses in attempt to look "lady"like.

The door to the home jerks open and Mrs. Merrick, a little fair, fat, honest, loquacious, good-humored, good sort of personage, of about fifty-six, rushes down the steps to embrace Maria. She crushes the startled girl to her and practically drags her into the home, yelling directions to John over her shoulder. The moment Maria is jerked toward the steps of the home, the MUSIC STOPS and the almost deafening ROAR OF LONDON STREETS HEARD, overpowering the scene until the two women step inside and the DOOR SHUTS, signaling the switch to the next scene.

INT. MRS. MERRICK'S FOYER AND FRONT STAIRWELL

Mrs. Merrick's home is clean and well kept, neither below or above the home in which Maria herself was raised. The foyer is small and the stairwell narrow.

MRS. MERRICK

My dear, dear girl, your original letter said to expect you yesterday but I figured that you would be here no earlier than today, what with traffic and such. I know how eager a young lady is to make her way to London for the season but I know that road from Rutland too and I knew that you would be here not a minute before this very moment—

MARIA

Mrs. Merrick?

MRS. MERRICK

Yes, dear? Oh, listen to me . . .

Split Screen, Horizontal from Bottom: Mrs. Herbert's PARASOL FILLS BOTTOM OF SCREEN during Mrs. Merrick's lines and "PUSHES" Mrs. Herbert a space of about a fourth of the screen. This section of the screen is FILLED by Mrs. Herbert's face and perfectly coiffed hair. Her parasol provides a rich and feminine background directly behind her, as she SPEAKS DIRECTLY to camera.

MRS. HERBERT

As if she had much choice.

Mrs. Herbert PULLS her parasol down over her split screen and snaps it shut, "PULLING" HER SCREEN OUT with SNAP of parasol.

MRS. MERRICK

You must need a moment to
freshen up and collect yourself
and such.

Mrs. Merrick leads Maria up the steps to her rooms, continuing to talk "a mile a minute" to the slightly bewildered girl the entire way. John follows the two women up the stairs, barely able to climb each step as he lugs Maria's trunk on his back.

Mrs. Merrick's considerable girth takes up the whole width of the stairs. Thus Maria must follow her up the stairs with John following her. The CAMERA FOLLOWS John up the stairs, giving the audience the effect of being wedged into the tight, awkward space along with Maria.

MRS. MERRICK

And you must be sending round
your card to Mrs. Herbert this
very afternoon.

Mrs. Merrick pauses on the steps and leaning around Maria to address John, a maneuver which almost sends the startled footman tumbling down the stairs.

MRS. MERRICK

John, did you hear? You must hurry with that trunk. Miss Villiers' card must be sent to Mrs. Herbert this afternoon, this afternoon, John.

Turning her focus back to Maria, Mrs. Merrick resumes climbing the stairs with a bewildered Maria and John in tow.

MRS. MERRICK

Your uncle gave me specific instructions that I might let my rooms to you under the conditions that you have an appropriate chaperone for your stay and that you already knew just such a lady, although I would have been happy to recommend one if needed. And here we are.

Mrs. Merrick stops abruptly on a landing in front of suite of rooms that she opens and leads Maria into. The modest set of rooms is almost identical in appearance to those Maria enjoyed at her uncle's estate. John crawls in and dumps the trunk down on the floor with a loud crash. Maria jumps, Mrs. Merrick hands her the key to the rooms, pats her on the shoulder and leaves, taking John with her and still giving instructions as she exits.

MRS. MERRICK

John, you come along with me, but be prepared to listen for the bell. Your mistress will be needing you to take her card this afternoon, this very afternoon. Maria, you will take tea in your rooms? Of course, of course, at 3 o'clock then. I will bring it up myself.

Maria sits down with her hat still on and dashes off a card to Mrs. Herbert, RINGS the bell for John and dispatches him to deliver the card.

Split Screen, Horizontal from Top: Mrs. Herbert, parasol strategically balanced to guard her from the sun, strolls through the Jardins du Luxembourg with TWO FRENCH FOOTMEN in tow. She WALKS in direction of and SPEAKS DIRECTLY to camera.

MRS. HERBERT

Cards should really be dashed off before plans are made, the chaise sets its sights toward London, and a footman narrowly escapes death by trunk.

As Mrs. Herbert completes her line, she is walking toward the screen, coming closer to the camera and sweeping by it as the camera PANS down to her feet and her screen SWEEPS UP AND OUT.

EXT./INT. MRS. HERBERT'S LONDON HOME/MARIA'S ROOM

Split Screen, Vertical: Maria unpacks her things quickly, sips her tea, attempts to write something in her journal, and waits and waits and waits for John's return.

John walks through the streets of London searching for the correct town home. Finally, discovering Mrs. Herbert's, he rings the bell and delivers his note to the YOUNG MAID who answers the door. Young maid looks confused, speaks briefly to John, hands him back the note and shuts the door.

Split Screen WIDENS to only Maria's room. Maria rises to answer the door before John can actually knock on it. Her disappointment is obvious he shows her his empty hands and shakes his head. She closes the door and sinks into the nearest chair, as her screen "SINKS" out of view and Mrs. Herbert's FLOWS into view.

Mrs. Herbert, fresh from her stroll through the Jardins, is seated at a Paris café, sipping tea. She turns slightly and DIRECTLY ADDRESSES camera.

MRS. HERBERT

It is not necessary to paint her disappointment; she was however, constrained to submit—I was at Paris and the time of my being in England again was uncertain. It was the first time in Maria's

(MORE)

MRS. HERBERT (CONT'D)
life she had been alone,
unattended by the cheerful voice
of domestic pleasure or the
enlivening smile of friendship.
The social and convivial hour
was far away.

As Mrs. Herbert takes a sip of tea following her last line,
her SCREEN SLIDES UP as Maria's RISES into the space with
the timing of Maria's body rising from her slump.

Maria rises and looks out into the street as the camera
SWEEPS OUT following her viewpoint into the darkening
London street. The camera view PANS BACK UP from the
street below to SHOW Maria standing in her window,
surrounded by darkness, lit from in front with a candle.

EXT./INT. MRS. MERRICK'S HOME/MRS. MERRICK'S DRAWING ROOM
THE NEXT DAY

Mrs. Merrick sits at a small table, absently munching the
remains of a tea biscuit while reading a worn copy of
Pamela. Wiping some crumbs but failing to get them all off
her bosom, she intently focuses on the novel, not hearing
Maria's entrance into the room.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)
A thousand moralists have
declaimed on the joys of
solitude and on the advantages
of silent contemplation. Our
heroine, for which I love her,
thought, or rather felt, unable
to bear that divine state of
heavenly solitude which she
endured the previous night and
current morning. And, of course
. . . .

MARIA
Mrs. Merrick?

MRS. MERRICK

Oh, Maria! How are you dear?
Slept well, I suspect? Yes, of
course. And you are off to see
your lovely Mrs. Herbert for
dinner this evening?

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

I would be dining at the lovely
home of a Parisian friend that
evening.

MARIA

I sent my card, by John,
yesterday.

MRS. MERRICK

Yes . . .

MARIA

She is . . . not home.

MRS. MERRICK

Not home, dear?

MARIA

Yes, I mean, no . . . She went
to Paris.

MRS. MERRICK

To Paris? France? Do you mean
for the season? Oh dear, no, no,
this will not do, dear. I must
admit I was a little surprised
that you came to town to live
alone, but your uncle assured me
that an appropriate chaperone
was in place to supervise your
stay. And now . . .

Mrs. Merrick stops her chatter at Maria's obviously mounting distress. She immediately rises and embraces a rather stiff Maria, leaving a smattering of crumbs on the front of Maria's dress as she pulls away and leads the girl to sit in the chair facing her own.

MRS. MERRICK

Now, no need to fret. I shall fix everything. I know a mighty agreeable widow lady whom I used to serve as housekeeper and, to top all, she lives on this very street. This lady is one of quality and keeps the best of company. I will send her a note myself; I am sure she will take on the role of chaperone for such a charming young lady.

MARIA

Oh, thank you, Mrs. Merrick. I am most eager to meet the lady. Thank you, thank you.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Maria sits with her journal open in her lap, tapping her foot and watching the door. Hearing a CREAK on the door, she rushes to open it and once again finds John, hand up, preparing to knock. He bows and hands her an envelope.

Maria shuts the door and opens the card. The camera follows her gaze to a card with the following written on it: "Lady Hardy at home Jan 19th."

EXT. LONDON STREETS/MARIA'S CHAIR NIGHT OF JAN 19

Maria is SHOWN WHIZZING through the streets of London; the blur of lights created by her swift travel give the 18th century London night lights an almost modern/Las Vegas-like appearance. In the garish (artificial) primary colors and night surrounding Maria, she stands out in her pale pink dress, which is clearly a less costly, less elaborate reality to that worn in her earlier dream sequence.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

The 19th of January arrived, and as Youth are better judges of Passion than Manners or Sense,

(MORE)

MRS. HERBERT (V.O. CONT'D)

Maria made her way to Lady Hardy's, having exhausted a third part of her little treasury in preparing for this important moment.

EXT. LADY HARDY'S HOME/INT. LADY HARDY'S FOYER AND STAIRS
SAME NIGHT

Maria's chair arrives at a plain, but affluent London house, and she is handed out the chair by John, whose wig is only slightly askew tonight and who wears a somewhat concerned expression at seeing their current locale. Entering the home, Maria scans the entrance foyer, where two YOUNG GENTLEMEN are being handed coats and hats for departure. They give Maria an admiring glance, notice her blushing response, smirk, and offer something resembling a bow before departing.

LADY HARDY appears at the top of the stairs and greets Maria. While Lady Hardy is a tall, large-boned woman, she is almost overshadowed by a large oil painting of Samson and Delilah hung directly behind her on the stairs. At the fork of the staircase (where two briefcase flights can take one either to the left or right), Maria can see a series of smaller female portraits going up the walls of each staircase. The camera SCANS of these will LINGER for just a moment on a portrait of DORIGNON.

Lady Hardy, about age 43 and claiming to be/dressing as a young 32, is what in the country can be called a hearty, hale, comely, and portly woman. She possesses coarse features, a ruddy complexion, and an air, manner and voice not very expressive of female softness.

LADY HARDY

Miss Villiers, I am charmed to at last make your personal acquaintance. And what a charming one it is, to have such a young beauty in my house.

MARIA

Lady Ha-- my lady . . . your ladyship, thank you so much for
(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

your kindness, your kindne--
kind invitation and your
extension of, of the duty or the
kindness of serving as my chap-

LADY HARDY

Hush that my new bashful, *ma
petite mauvaise honte* (laughing)
You are a delight! Although
while your dress is delightful,
this color is a tad toooo
chaste, don't you think? You
would look so much more
scrumptious in a slightly
richer, darker shade, but don't
fret, don't fret, all that
later. Your natural loveliness
alone will excite such
admiration from our good
company.

Lady Hardy places Maria's arm through her own and leads her
up the stairs to their right. A soft "Suite in C Minor"
(Gavotte) performed by Recorder and Classical Guitar PLAYS
in the background from Maria's entrance into the house.
Following Mrs. Herbert's V.O., the music FILLS the
stairwell.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

If fortune, dress or title
alone, abstracted from all
regard to character or qualities
of the head and heart could
constitute good company, this
set would undoubtedly merit the
name.

INT. LADY HARDY'S DRAWING ROOMS SAME NIGHT

As soon as the double doors are opened by the footman and
Lady Hardy and Maria enter the room, the recorder and
classical guitar playing "Suite in C Minor" SWITCHES to a
blues harmonica and electric guitar covering the same song.
The music FADES down to background as the sound of couples
TALKING loudly, gaming chips CLINKING together, drinks
being POURED and general PARTY NOISES RISES above it.

Lady Hardy leads Maria around the well-furnished, dimly lit rooms and introduces her to the party, which is comprised mostly of men. Both men and women sit at the several card tables scattered throughout the adjoining rooms. The women, while expensively dressed and jewel-bedecked, are pushing the limits on the current fashion's propensity to show cleavage. Make-up does a lot of for these "ladies" and some truly are attractive, but Maria is clearly the youngest, prettiest woman in the room.

More paintings of women fill this room as well, although there are several nudes included in this grouping. Paintings hover between the celebration of the female form and the pornographic. A large oil painting of Lord Hardy stands over the fireplace in the final room Lady Hardy enters with Maria.

CAPT. WILSON leans against the mantelpiece directly underneath it and casually lights his pipe while a large glass of brandy and a silver flask rest on the mantel near him. Lady Hardy leads Maria over to her lover, Captain Wilson, a handsome, somewhat portly man in his late 30s.

LADY HARDY

Capt. Wilson, may I present Miss Maria Villiers. The delightful Mrs. Merrick has secured me to serve as her (ever so slight edge of sarcasm) chaperone during her stay in town.

CAPT. WILSON

Delightful. Miss Villiers, I am charmed. May I offer you any service that I can possibly provide for you during your stay? I am an old friend of the late Lord Hardy and a young friend of her Ladyship.

LADY HARDY

Capt. Wilson, you are too much for my new dove. Capt. Wilson first contracted my friendship on a visit to my dearly departed lord (gestures toward painting of Lord Hardy) and has been such a rock since my coming to London as a sad widow.

CAPT. WILSON

Well, I do enjoy a country lass fresh come to town. It is right and good that you should engage a protective house like that of her Ladyship so soon in this new venture. We cannot all have the good fortune to land a baronet from the advantage of the dairy farm.

LADY HARDY

(With a slight edge) Capt. Wilson imagines that every lady new come to town must be a bumpkin.

CAPT. WILSON

Lucky for you, my heart, that is certainly Mrs. Merrick's case.

LADY HARDY

Well played, young friend.

Maria stands politely during this interchange, but she is only half listening and really scanning the room, mentally comparing it to that of her dream sequence. She is disappointed.

LADY HARDY'S FOOTMAN 1

Lord Melville!

The adult Melville enters the room casually, almost indolently. He is a tall, slender man, impeccably dressed without even trying. Melville possesses that air of distinction, that easy dignity, compared to which the beauty that he has in abundance, alone is a mere dead letter.

Melville glances around the room, spots Maria who has hastily turned at the sound of a title, and makes his way across the room. The blues rendition of "Suite C" SWITCHES ever so quietly into Heart's "Magic Man."

MELVILLE

(Bowing over Maria's hand)
So much beauty, under such protection, must necessarily attract the notice of every man who is at all its votary.

LADY HARDY

Miss Villiers, I present Lord Melville, or rather, he presents himself. Really, my lord, bored already? I have just now acquired my new dove.

MELVILLE

Fresh and blooming as Hebes, playful as the Mother of Loves, the form of the beautiful Miss Villiers invites me. Forgive me, Miss Villiers, if I have offended (bowing over and kissing her hand, which he never actually released from formal hold).

MARIA

No, my lord. Your address is polite and spirited and thus your company, I am sure, is not offensive but rather a happy mixture of good sense and goodheartedness.

LADY HARDY

Well played, dove. His lordship is blessed with a doting father who has spared no expense or trouble in keeping him well read, well traveled, and to adorn his person, polish his behavior, cultivate his understanding—

Split Screen, Vertical from Stage Left: A CLOSE-UP of Mrs. Herbert, seated in rich velvet chair by a marble fireplace. She uses the back of her right hand to "PUSH" her way onto a slight portion of screen to deliver her quip.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

Corrupt his heart.

Lady Hardy STEPS to her left and effectively "PUSHES" Mrs. Herbert's split screen off.

LADY HARDY

--in all which points his labors
have been crowned with success,
as the person of his lordship
and his presence in my house
attest to.

MELVILLE

Her ladyship is too kind.
Perhaps, Miss Villiers and I
might withdraw from all this
praise to a table of quadrille
before it becomes quite too much
for me to live up to.

Melville offers Maria his arm and escorts her to the
nearest card table, where two players, a man and woman, are
departing together and heading for the nearest exit into
the main hallway of the house. The DEALER, a woman of 30
or so glances up at the newest arrivals.

DEALER

Twenty guineas to play, loves.

Melville takes out the required amount for his play only
and looks expectantly at Maria. Maria is clearly surprised
at the cost but removes the required amount from her purse
and places it in the pot. Cards are dealt during
conversation.

MELVILLE

Have you played much quadrille,
Miss Villiers?

MARIA

No, my lord. A dear friend who
visited with a neighboring
family this past summer
introduced us to Whist.

MELVILLE

They are similar, you know. But
those confining partnerships of
Whist aren't really necessary to
our game.

MARIA

Oh, do you play it solo then?

MELVILLE

One can. Of course (glancing at his cards and then hers and seeing the right King), we will form an alliance.

The dealer completes her task.

DEALER

Tricks, my loves.

MELVILLE

Six. Propose to Miss Villiers.

Maria blushes as remaining bids or tricks are given and is delighted to find that she and Melville have won the hand.

MELVILLE

Miss Villiers, I would love to stay and continue such a fine engagement but I fear I am committed elsewhere. May I beg permission to so abruptly leave your beautiful company without offering offense?

MARIA

My lord, your delightful company has made me bless the happy impulse that brought me into it. I can only thank you for gracing me with your presence.

MELVILLE

(Bowing low of her hand and admiring the slight amount décolleté revealed)
Where has so much beauty till now been concealed?

MARIA

Till we meet again then, my lord.

MELVILLE

Such a charming future expectation cannot be realized too soon.

Melville departs as Maria follows him to the door with her eyes. Lady Hardy, who has circulated throughout the room and come to rest in Capt. Wilson's attention again by the fireplace, notices Melville's departure. She excuses herself from Capt. Wilson and makes her way over to Maria, who is exiting the table so another couple may sit down.

LADY HARDY

How goes it, my new dove? You seem to have made an easy conquest of his young lordship. His father, Lord Claremont, and myself are also ol . . . young friends as, Capt. Wilson would say.

MARIA

Oh, my lady, this has been just a wonder . . . no, a delightful evening.

Maria flushes with pleasure at Lady Hardy's compliment, appearing very much a like a child who has been given a candy for good behavior at the "grown up' table. Lady Hardy's Footman 1 approaches the two women and waits for acknowledgement.

LADY HARDY

Yes?

LADY HARDY'S FOOTMAN 1

Miss Villiers' chair, my lady.

LADY HARDY

Oh my, you are not ready to leave us just yet, are you, my dove?

MARIA

Your ladyship honors me with the desire to continue in my company tonight, but I fear I am quite untuned after the delightful turn of conversation with his lordship.

LADY HARDY

Of course, of course, darling
girl. One must not wear it all
out on the first night. Go
home, rest yourself with sweet
dreams, my dove.

Lady Hardy kisses Maria on both cheeks, and Maria departs
after the footman. No one really notices her leave except
a few of the men, who pause only slightly in the card games
and quickly return to the task at hand.

Capt. Wilson strolls up behind Lady Hardy, who is watching
Maria's retreat with a hard, calculating expression. A
recorder and classical guitar PLAY a few strains of the
Eagles' "Witchy Woman" before MOVING INTO AND CONTINUING
WITH an accurate period piece in the background.

CAPT. WILSON

Well, by Jove, she has done well
for herself right off the start.

LADY HARDY

Perhaps, perhaps. His
lordship's attention to her
tonight was only natural—she is
pretty, she is young, she is
new. But more importantly, and
this is what may hold him beyond
the ride to St. James's-Street,
she has a skill that I cannot
teach as effectively as natural
inclination can profess it.

CAPT. WILSON

My love?

LADY HARDY

She distinguished him in the
very first moment she saw him--a
manner the most flattering to
his self-love.

SPLIT SCREEN INT. MARIA'S ROOM AT MRS. MERRICK'S AND
MELVILLE'S FOYER TO DINING ROOM LATER THAT SAME NIGHT

Maria, dressed in her nightgown, wrapper and nightcap, sits at her writing desk, happily composing a letter to Louisa. The camera PANS up behind her as Mrs. Herbert's V.O. reads the letter that we can now SEE.

Melville enters his foyer and hands his coat, hat and gloves to a WAITING FOOTMAN. He then walks into his dining room, where a late meal has been set. On his first entrance, it appears that the meal has been set just for him.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

"I passed a delightful evening
in the best of company, at the
house of a very respectable
lady, the widow of a baronet.
And I have attracted the notice
of the most amiable nobleman in
town, the heir of an immense
fortune—But his rank and fortune
are the least my considerations.
I have found the man formed on
earth to make me happy—

Maria cheerfully fills her pages of stationary.

The camera of the Melville scene PANS the table as Melville casually tosses himself into the chair at the head of the table nearest the entrance. The lens COMES TO REST on Dorignon seated at the foot of the table with her wine glass raised in a slight toast to her lord and a seductive smile on her face.

With hair the color of dirty honey and features that are a little too large for her small frame, Mademoiselle Dorignon is a female more distinguished by her spirit than her charms; she possesses that certain 'je ne sais quoi' which so effectually answers the end of beauty. She is clearly a woman who exploits what she does have; she sits at the late meal she has ordered dressed in scanty version of a night wrapper with her stays and stockings visible, diamond and pearl necklaces around her neck and large drop diamond and pearl earrings hanging from her lobes.

At the moment when Dorignon's CLOSE-UP FILLS her section of the screen, Maria LOOKS UP from writing her letter to give the audience a visual juxtaposition of the two women. Dorignon smiles/leers seductively at Melville while Maria, a few curls escaping her somewhat matronly nightcap, sighs in innocent contentment, smiles dreamily, and bends her head back down to continue writing her letter.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

"I have found him! A man possest
of that bewitching delicacy of
sentiment—that dear sensibility—
that perfect honor—

Maria pauses to re-ink her pen, daintily taps it to rid it of extra ink, and writes on.

Melville pops a sweetmeat in his mouth and takes a draught of wine before heading languidly down the table to Dorignon. The TWO DOOR FOOTMEN stationed in the room move toward the door.

MRS. HERBERT (V.O.)

"His looks exprest such a
benevolence of heart—that noble
simplicity of character—It was
Virtue adorned by the Graces—

Maria stops writing and glances toward the window as she hears the town crier SHOUT the late hour outside her window.

The screen SPLITS into three vertical columns as Mrs. Herbert, sitting in her chair by the fire, SLIDES onto the screen, WEDGING Melville's screen between her screen and Maria's. Mrs. Herbert's scene is CAST in a warmer, rosier light than the sharp contrast of the real time scenes of Maria and Melville. She turns and seems to "see" the scene unfolding in Melville's screen. Quickly, rising from her chair, she "STEPS" into Melville's screen and PUSHES her own split screen off with a flip of her hand. Mrs. Herbert continues to be SHOWN in the warmer lighting effects of her own scene, causing a distinction in her appearance in Melville's screen.

The camera in the Melville scene MOVES with the footmen to outside the dining room and SHOOTS BACK in from the foyer upon Melville lifting the petite Dorignon from her chair onto the table with one arm and swooping dishes and wine glasses into the floor with the other just as the last line of Maria's letter is read.

As the doors are closed by Mrs. Herbert who sweeps past the footmen, Melville lays the laughing form of Dorignon on the table and climbs on top of her.

Maria hastily signs her letter and seals it, setting it on her desk as Mrs. Herbert gives Maria's screen a slight SHOVE as she delivers the first sentence of the following lines and SENDS Maria off from the audience's view point. Mrs. Herbert leans slightly back against the doors of Melville's dining room as she completes her line, DIRECTLY ADDRESSING the camera.

MRS. HERBERT

We will leave Miss Villiers to dream of the all-accomplished Lord Melville. She was now clearly convinced of what she had always believed that there is between certain souls a secret sympathy, which it is almost impossible to resist.

Mrs. Herbert SWEEPS off the screen as the camera PANS down and the screen is FILLED by the swirls of her elaborate velvet dressing gown.

EXT. COL. DORMER'S RUTLAND ESTATE EARLY MORNING

An empty chaise is parked in front of the home. A groom leads a saddled horse up to stand opposite the chaise.

INT. STAIRCASE AND FOYER COL. DORMER'S HOUSE EARLY MORNING

Louisa hurriedly descends the stairs, securing her hat and putting on her gloves as she goes, while Col. Dormer, also at a swift pace, comes into the foyer from the dining room. The two almost collide at the bottom of the stairs. Both rush out their lines speaking over each other.

LOUISA

Uncle?! Forgive me—

COL. DORMER

No, my dear, forgive me. I am in such haste—

LOUISA/COL. DORMER
(Both characters speaking at
once) Stamford to fetch the post.

COL. DORMER
Well, shall we go together than,
niece?

Louisa nods ascent and takes her uncle's arm, as he takes his gloves and hat from the WAITING FOOTMAN 2. The two exit the house together; the camera CONTINUES TO SHOOT them through the door as Col. Dormer helps Louisa into the waiting chaise and mounts his horse. The scene CLOSES as the Waiting Footman 2 SHUTS the door upon the departure shot.

EXT. INN AT STAMFORD LATER THAT SAME MORNING

Louisa's chaise pulls up to the door of the post. Col. Dormer precedes her on horseback. A STABLE BOY runs to meet Col. Dormer and take the reins of the horse. Col. Dormer dismounts and enters the inn. Louisa anxiously waits in the chaise. Col. Dormer reappears quickly with two slim letters. He wears a puzzled expression as he hands Louisa her letter.

COL. DORMER
No letter from Mrs. Herbert . . .

LOUISA
(Reading the letter Maria wrote
to her in the previous scene,
distracted)
What, uncle?

COL. DORMER
(Beginning to read his own
letter from Louisa)
Oh, what, niece? Oh yes, I
wrote to Mrs. Herbert the day
after Maria left Belfont, to
recommend her in the strongest
terms to that friendship she so
warmly professed for Maria this
summer.

LOUISA
(Still reading)
Mmmm . . .

 COL. DORMER
But, of course, one must
consider the scene of the London
season and excuse the silence .
. . and here (pointing at the
letter), here it is. Maria
communicates that Mrs. Herbert
is not in town currently but is
every day expected.

Louisa completes reading her letter. Wearing a concerned
look, she gives her uncle her complete focus upon hearing
that Mrs. Herbert is not in residence in London.

 COL. DORMER
"In the meantime," Maria writes
that she is "under the
protection of a lady who was so
happy to be of Mrs. Merrick's
acquaintance." Well, there, that
settles it; your sister is well
and safe in her adventures.

Col. Dormer folds his letter and places it in the pocket of
his coat. He tips his hat to Louisa, mounts his horse and
turns toward Belfont. The WILLIAM, the driver of Louisa's
chaise turns toward his passenger, waiting for an
indication that he is to follow. Louisa sits for a moment,
scanning her own letter from Maria once again. She lays it
beside her on the seat chaise and removes an unsealed
letter from her pocket.

 LOUISA
One moment, William, I need to
amend my response to Miss
Villiers.

Louisa begins to rise from the chaise, as William scrabbles
down to help her out. As she reaches for William's hand,
Montague arrives in the yard of the inn on horseback.
Startled by the appearance of her love interest, Louisa
hastily sits back down, knocking Maria's letter unnoticed
into the floor of the chaise and quickly smoothing her
dress and hair.

Montague spots Louisa and smiles as he dismounts and walks toward Louisa.

MONTAGUE

Miss Villiers! I have just come to collect our post for today, but I see you have beat me to the task. Perhaps you are trying to avoid my customary delivery of your letters.

LOUISA

Oh, Uncle and I were eager to hear from Maria and came to town ourselves to collect it. But, of course, you are always welcome to visit Belfont. I would not mean to suggest a lack of gratitude for your kindn-

MONTAGUE

I apologize, Miss Villiers. You are too fun to tease that I could not resist. In seriousness, I would be greatly honored if I could call on yo(u) . . . your uncle this afternoon . . . perhaps I could indeed call daily on him until my return to school is required a month hence.

LOUISA

That would be wonderful! We would be so happy to receive you.

MONTAGUE

Thank you for your kindness, Miss Villiers. I feared you might leave us as well.

LOUISA

Leave?

MONTAGUE

To join the other Miss Villiers.
I know you must be worried about
her alone in the city.

LOUISA

Ah, Miss Villiers is well . . .
well and safe, as Uncle says.
He has only this day heard of
her security under the
supervision of a reputable
chaperone while she waits for
Mrs. Herbert to return to the
city. And she writes me . . .
she writes me of how fine and
. . . suitable her new chaperone
is and how . . . kind the lady's
friends have been to her.

MONTAGUE

Splendid! I am glad to hear of
her success and know her
prospects are many.

LOUISA

(Uncomfortable with her half-
truths)
Yes, I'm sure.

Montague bows a farewell to Louisa. William drives back in the direction of Belfont as Montague enters the inn to collect his own mail. As Louisa leaves the inn's drive, a swift breeze causes Maria's letter to Louisa to fly off of the seat and away from the chaise. Louisa tries to catch it but the letter is moving too quickly. Frustrated with her inability to catch it, she glances down and realizes she is still holding her own letter to her sister. The scene ends with a FADING shot of Maria's address in London.

INT. MARIA'S ROOMS IN LONDON MID-MORNING

The following scene FADES IN from underneath the fading out of Maria's address as shown in the previous scene. Handel's "My heart is inditing" on recorder and harpsichord PLAYS in the background and BECOMES louder and louder as the scene comes up. As Maria comes into focus, the music CHANGES into a baroque rendition of Madonna's "Material Girl." As the scene develops, the same song continues but the music MORPHS into a pop-punk version with a female singer.

Maria, dressed in far more elaborate gown than anything seen thus far, sits at her toilette while a HAIRDRESSER is at work. A MILLINER and her ASSISTANT stand to one side of Maria showing her various elaborate hats. At her feet, a CORDWAINER kneels amongst several boxes of shoes as he tries them on Maria's feet. Maria is looking through and dividing up a pile of calling cards on a silver tray on her vanity. She pauses occasionally to accept or reject suggestions by her Milliner, Cordwainer or Hairdresser.

Mrs. Merrick bustles in and out with a tray of breakfast pastries and tea, looks around for a spot to put it on the low table near the sofa, tosses Maria's leather bound journal onto the sofa where it is promptly covered by gowns that have just been delivered by a new MAID, and puts down the tray. Mrs. Merrick looks on dotingly at Maria's evidence of "success" surrounding her and leaves the room.

Having completed Maria's coiffure, the Hairdresser waits to be paid by Maria. Maria admires herself in the mirror of her vanity while absentmindedly handing the Hairdresser a large sum of money from her purse. The Hairdresser exits, and the Cordwainer and Milliner both stand in front of Maria awaiting instruction. Maria, looking briefly conflicted that she might have to choose between all the hats and shoes, indicates that she wants them to leave all of the products that they brought today. Both the Cordwainer and Milliner smile deeply; the Cordwainer kisses Maria's hand while the Milliner gives her a deep curtesy.

The two merchants exit as Maria shoves her purse back into the vanity, rises, collects the cards she selected for today's visits, and exits the room, followed by her new maid who carries one of the new hats and a cloak.

INT. LADY HARDY'S UPSTAIRS DRAWING ROOMS LATER THAT EVENING

Maria stands at the fireplace with Lady Hardy in very much the same tableau as her earlier visit. Maria wears a deep mauve ball gown and her hair is even more elaborately dressed than in the previous scene. She is anxiously scanning the room.

LADY HARDY

My fair dove, that glance of
enquiry, I'm afraid, is in vain.
Alas! The most charming of
mankind, our darling Lord
Melville, is far away tonight.

Maria looks sharply at Lady Hardy. Her cheeks glow with a
blush of wounded sensibility and disappointment.

LADY HARDY

I called on one of my old gir .
. . acquaintances today, an old
family friend of his lordship.
I mentioned that he might wear
someone's chains, someone who
would be present at my soiree
tonight. In passing, she
informed me that Lord Melville
would be dining with his father
Lord Claremont this evening.

MARIA

Oh . . .

LADY HARDY

Never fear, my dove. We shall
find you another companion.
Granted you are no longer new,
but I am sure we can find you
pleasant notice at a quadrille
table.

Lady Hardy steers Maria to a gaming table, where she
reluctantly joins the game and begins to play.

INT. LIBRARY OF LORD CLAREMONT'S THE SAME NIGHT

Melville strolls into Lord Claremont's library to find his
father comfortably seated by the fire with a glass of
brandy in one hand and a political pamphlet in the other.
The remains of a meal sit on a silver tray on a low table
near Lord Claremont. TWO CLAREMONT FOOTMEN stand at the
door.

LORD CLAREMONT

Good evening, Melville. You look like an Adonis; off somewhere?

Melville glances indulgently at himself in the polished silver serving tray bearing the remains of his father's supper.

MELVILLE

Your Lordship is partial—I really think I look ill. I shall retire early tonight, I would say.

LORD CLAREMONT

You are mistaken. There is in your whole air and manner a well-fancied nonchalance, which would not fail in its effect.

MELVILLE

You flatter, my Lord.

LORD CLAREMONT

Perhaps, but it is indeed the opinion of all of the women.

MELVILLE

Women, my Lord?

Melville motions, without looking at the man, to CLAREMONT FOOTMAN 1 to fetch him a drink of brandy from the decanter.

LORD CLAREMONT

Yes, women, indeed. Which leads us to our business—I believe, Melville, I shall marry you off in about six weeks.

Melville calmly takes a glass of brandy from a Claremont Footman 1.

MELVILLE

As you please, my Lord; you know I never interfere in family affairs.

LORD CLAREMONT

And in those of the heart, you
will do the justice to own, I
never take upon me to dictate.

Lord Claremont raises his glass in a toast to Melville who
responds in kind.

LORD CLAREMONT

But to our marriage—the lady I
think of is the only daughter of
a Nabob—

MELVILLE

A Nabob?

LORD CLAREMONT

Yes, an Englishman fresh from
making his fortune in India, a
scoundrel, to be sure. But no
matter; he has offered us 80,000
lbs down—a handsome sum, for
which we have a present
occasion. You know the mortgage
is large; and I want to build a
house in Mansfield street; and I
fancy you can dispense with a
little ready money.

Melville nods his assent and casually sips his brandy.

MELVILLE

Certainly, my Lord, certainly.
I understand you and will comply
with everything reasonable.

LORD CLAREMONT

Excellent, but, Melville, we
must deal with Dorignon. She
may be your inclination; but
even if she was handsome enough,
the vivacity of her temper
renders her the most improper
mistress breathing for a man
intended to be married. She must
abdicate.

Melville hands his empty brandy glass to Claremont Footman 1 (again, without actually looking at the man), discreetly hides a yawn with his lace handkerchief, and glances around the room with a somewhat bored expression.

MELVILLE

Of course, I leave that to your Lordship's management. I should be glad to make some provision for her, and get rid of her without . . . noise.

LORD CLAREMONT

You will do well. I have a West Indian in my eye for her. Just arrived from that uncivilized, barbarous place, he knows about as much of the world as a country school-boy of 13. She will be able to secure a liberal allowance from such a young man. And, in keeping with this plan, I have taken the liberty of sending an invitation to Dorignon to accompany this "business acquaintance" and me to the opera tomorrow evening.

MELVILLE

I go to the opera tomorrow evening, as well, my Lord.

LORD CLAREMONT

With Sir Charles, I presume? Excellent, your strolls and poses through Fop's alley should be enough to pique her vanity, which will naturally put her on coquetting with our West Indian, and the rest will follow.

A door OPENS into the main foyer outside of the library. A CLAREMONT FOOTMAN 2 enters, bows to both men, and walks over to Lord Claremont after the latter acknowledges him. Claremont Footman 2 whispers something to Lord Claremont, whose smiling response closely resembles a leer. A woman's figure, still cloaked, APPEARS in the doorway. Due to the low lighting, only her silhouette IS VISIBLE.

Sensing the opportunity to escape to more exciting venues, Melville bows first to LORD CLAREMONT'S MISTRESS and then to his father. He exits the room as she enters. The last shot SHOWS her putting back the hood of her cloak but never shows her face.

INT. MARIA'S ROOMS AT MRS. MERRICK'S THE FOLLOWING MORNING

Baroque version of "Material Girl" heard earlier PLAYS softly in the background only to END in a flat, misplayed note as Maria goes through her stack of bills.

Alone in the room, Maria sits, with her ridiculously high hair and elaborate gown, on the stool at her dressing table. She goes through a large stack of bills from hairdressers, milliners, dressmakers, the company from which she hired a carriage, etc. She then opens the drawer where she stores her purse, takes out the purse and opens it. Her face shows her alarm at the depleted state of her finances.

She frantically reaches back into the drawer, as if she will find some money that might have escaped the confines of the purse, and pulls out her leather bound journal from the back of the drawer.

Maria opens the journal to the first page of her tragedy. The camera shows a CLOSE-UP of the first page complete with title, "The Tragedy of Eliza Goode," and some of the opening lines. Maria frantically flips through and scans pages as the voiceovers below are heard. The voiceover section below proceeds rapidly with each new voiceover overlapping the lines preceding it. The camera CONTINUES TO FOCUS on whirl of the pages and the quick movements of her hands.

TRAGIC ACTOR (V.O.)

I must move you to hear the
tragic tale of Eliza Goode, once
the brightest star in our
English sky. Now, brought low
by the lustful ambitions of a
cruel and vile man. And yet
while Eliza's star has fallen,
while life is indeed very, very
bad, she is still good.

IMAGINARY AUDIENCE MEMBERS (V.O.)

Bravo! Well Done!

IMAGINARY THEATRE CRITIC (V.O.)

Miss V- has clearly outdone herself. Finally, a piece truly fulfilling its titular claims, "A Tragedy, Written in Imitation of Shakespeare's Style."

The camera SCANS UP from the page, along Maria's gown, to her triumphant smile, and ENDS up in her elaborate coiffure, SHOWING a shell cameo containing the profile of a woman with a startling resemblance to Mrs. Herbert. As the camera ZOOMS in for a CLOSE-UP of the jewelry, the profile of Mrs. Herbert TURNS and DIRECTLY ADDRESSES camera.

MRS. HERBERT

Diffident as Maria is by nature, enthusiasm broke through the veil of modesty when left alone to enlarge her circle with her very estimable (sarcasm) friends, to become one of a certain set, to make her fortune at gold quadrille, to draw designs for her future coronet, and to dream of the all-accomplished Lord Melville. Now, she turns back to her first naiveté, certain of her tragedy being received with rapture by the managers; and thus, her debts paid. The work is, after all, both mellifluous and sublime.

The camera angle WIDENS on Mrs. Herbert's last line, SHOWING OUT-OF-FOCUS portion of the room in the background from Maria's hair. Mrs. Herbert and Maria's decorated coif STAY in focus while the audience can HEAR and SEE that Lady Hardy has entered the room.

MRS. HERBERT

Seeing her tragedy again, Maria determined to take every possible opportunity of seeing tragedies at both theatres, as well as the opera house, in order to solve the difficulty of which house to give preference,
(MORE)

MRS. HERBERT (CONT'D)
as well as the degree of merit
of performers. Luckily, just
such an . . . opportunity had
arrived.

The camera angle WIDENS rapidly at the end of Mrs.
Herbert's line to put Maria and Lady Hardy IN FOCUS. The
angle of Maria's head during the conversation causes the
cameo of Mrs. Herbert to NOT BE IN VIEW.

Lady Hardy is seated on the sofa with a tea tray in front
of her on the table, and Maria has turned on her stool and
is intently listening to her new mentor.

LADY HARDY
You simply must attend the opera
with me this evening, my dove.
You will hear Rauzzini in a new
opera of Sacchini and see the
brilliant Baccelli. It is, I am
told, a divine opera; it is the
second night; it is Saturday.

Lady Hardy pauses for effect as Maria leans in closer.

LADY HARDY
And there, my dove, you will be
certain of seeing Lord Melville,
who, I am quite sure, is
languishing for an opportunity
of telling you to what degree
you have charmed him.

MARIA
But I thought, my dear Madam,
your ladyship had been engaged
this evening on charitable
party, to play loo with a sick
friend.

LADY HARDY
Yes, child, but the party is
broke; my sick friend, who was
turned of fourscore, has done
the most impertinent, impolite
thing in the world—she chose to
(MORE)

LADY HARDY (CONT'D)

die last night, sitting up in bed, in a fit of coughing, with a flush of trumps in her hand.

Maria looks astonished; Lady Hardy sips her tea and proceeds.

LADY HARDY

I hear she has settled annuities on all her dogs, except Julio, and made her chambermaid executrix. I know, there is no accounting for the caprices of old women; for my part, I think Julio, the only supportable being in her house. The dear little creature, a true Bolognese! So much the air of a dog of quality! But I must leave you, my dove; I have only just time to dress and dine.

Lady Hardy rises on her last line with Maria scrambling to her feet after her. Maria looks completely perplexed.

LADY HARDY

Remember to put on all your charms.

Lady Hardy kisses both of Maria's cheeks and exits the room. The camera SCANS UP from the lipstick impression on Maria's right cheek to her hair and ENDS the cameo of Mrs. Herbert.

MRS. HERBERT

Maria had not perfectly understood the part of the conversation related to her Ladyship's recent loss. But she was entirely under the guidance of Lady Hardy, who until securing plans with Maria, was sadly (sarcasm) facing an approaching evening of nothing to do. The Opera was therefore her pis aller.

INT. DRAWING ROOM BELFONT EARLY EVENING, SAME DAY

Col. Dormer sits comfortably before the fire in a large, plush chair reading a new book on botany. The paper and string in which the book arrived has been messily discarded next to the chair; he is engrossed in his new book. A soft snow FALLS outside the window behind his chair.

Louisa sits at a small writing desk with her back to her uncle. A small spaniel lies sleeping at her feet. She reads a letter from her sister; the envelope in which the letter arrived is neatly stacked next to her other mail on the desk.

As she reads the letter, Louisa's brow begins to wrinkle in concern. Her ever stiffer posture also conveys her growing agitation. She addresses her uncle without turning around from the desk. The dog looks up at her voice and wags his tail.

LOUISA

Uncle? (Pause for reply) Uncle?

COL. DORMER

What? Yes, my dear. What is it? Good news from London, I'm sure.

LOUISA

Has Maria mentioned to you this new chaperone that Mrs. Merrick secured for her?

COL. DORMER

Of course, my dear. I am her guardian. I know that you girls see me as old and decrepit but I am abreast of the situation, do not worry.

LOUISA

(Still skimming the letter) What is your impression of . . . Lady Hardy?

COL. DORMER

(Going back to reading his book while "carrying on" his conversation with Louisa) Top notch, top notch. Mrs. Merrick and Maria both say so.

LOUISA

She seems, Lady Hardy that is, she seems to be much at playing cards, do you not think so?

COL. DORMER

Hmmmm. Yes, yes.

LOUISA

And being distracted by such a . . . lifestyle, I am not sure how closely she is supervising Maria's potential suitors.

COL. DORMER

Suitors? No, Maria has not written of suitors. Nothing to concern ourselves with there.

LOUISA

Yes, well, Maria is very beautiful so I am sure she has those who wish to pursue such a relationship with her.

COL. DORMER

Beautiful? Of course, she is beautiful. Both of my nieces are the most beautiful girls in five parishes. But beautiful girls, not women yet. Do not wish your sister's youth away, my dear. She is but a slip of a

(MORE)

COL. DORMER (CONT'D)
girl, and I am sure Lady Hardy
is well aware that she is just
"playing" at attending a Season.

LOUISA
But—

COL. DORMER
Your twin will be home soon, my
sweet girl. I know you miss
her. I miss her terribly
myself. Oh my!

At his last exclamation, Louisa turns in her seat. All she discovers is that her uncle has simply found a particular exciting passage about new gardening techniques and is happily folding the corner of the page down to mark it for later before flipping to a new section. She turns back to her desk.

LOUISA
I do miss her, uncle. (To
herself) And she is no child,
any more than I suspect that
Lady Hardy is an appropriate
chaperone.

At this point, Montague enters the room and a soft version of George Michael's "Careless Whisper" BEGINS on classical guitar and recorder in the background. Col. Dormer looks up and spots his guest. Montague gestures for Col. Dormer not to indicate his presence and begins to sneak up behind Louisa. Col. Dormer, viewing this flirtation as a "child's game," smiles and goes back to reading his book.

LOUISA
(Continuing to herself) Perhaps
I will make that trip to London.
Perhaps I will just see and
judge her Ladyship for myself.
And perhaps I shall just bring
Maria hom—

As Louisa whispers this line to herself, she prepares a clean sheet of paper and reaches for her ink pen as if to write the intentions she is mentioning. But her line is interrupted as Montague leans down and blows slightly on her ear.

Louisa jumps and dropping the hand reaching for her pen, turns to face her "attacker." Seeing Montague, she smiles in shy wonder. He takes her hand and kisses it gently.

At this moment William enters and bows to the room.

WILLIAM

Colonel, Miss, Master Montague,
dinner is served in the dining
room.

COL. DORMER

Well, young Master Montague has
arrived just in time then, has
he not, Louisa? Come, come,
sir, no pretense among
neighbors—you will dine with us.

Not waiting for Montague's answer, Col. Dormer places his open book upside down on the table near his chair and strolls through the packing papers at his feet and walks out the door of the drawing room toward the dining room. William bows to the other two occupants of the room and exits behind the Colonel.

Still holding Louisa's hand, Montague helps her rise from her chair. She begins to protest and gesture toward the paper intended for her letter to Maria.

MONTAGUE

Now, my dear Miss Villiers, you
heard the good Colonel—no
pretense amongst neighbors. Let
us dine together and then attend
to the post.

On this last line, Montague leans in slowly and kisses Louisa's cheek. With his face still near hers, he gives a quick glance to the door to insure that they are indeed alone for a moment and then kisses her softly but quickly on the mouth.

Louisa's eyes grow very wide, but she does not pull away. Blushing a little, she removes her hand from Montague's, drops a slight curtsy and leads the way out of the room with him behind her. During the kissing sequence, the background music slowly MORPHS into George Michael's actual rendition of the song. But NO LYRICS HEARD until the end of the scene so that the couple exits with Michael SINGING the following verse: "Time can never mend / The careless whispers of a good friend / To the heart and mind / Ignorance is kind / And there's no comfort in the truth."

INT. THE KING'S THEATRE THAT SAME NIGHT

Lady Hardy and Maria enter the theatre early and seat themselves between the two center pillars in the pit.

LADY HARDY

My dove, tonight's performance should be delightful. "Montezuma" gives us a little taste of the exotic. And I do so prefer the opera seria to the opera buffa. The costumes are so much more delightful.

MARIA

Yes, my lady.

LADY HARDY

The music of Sacchini, the voice of Rauzzini, the taste, the force and execution, and, let me add, what is not the least ornament of an opera, the striking coup d'oeil of the audience.

Lady Hardy nods discreetly at wealthier and more elaborately dressed members of the ton who are now entering the opera.

LADY HARDY

An audience, my dove, which the world cannot parallel, composed of all that is great and lovely in the kingdom.

Lady Hardy whispers the previous line as the music BEGINS and the lights DIM with a pointed nod to Lord Claremont as he escorts Dorignon and the West Indian into his box. Lord Claremont bows slightly in response; Dorignon arches her eyebrows, smiles, and ever so slightly inclines her head to her former madam.

Maria misses the interchange between Lord Claremont and Lady Hardy as she becomes enraptured by the opera. The camera SHOWS several successive shots of the opera intercut with shots of Maria's face glued to the stage and Lady Hardy fanning herself and flirting with various peers. Each shot from the stage MOVES the opera along toward RAUZZINI's death scene. Just as he SINGS his last note and Maria's whole soul is employed in admiration, Lady Hardy taps Maria rather abruptly with her fan.

Maria, startled, turns to inquire. Lady Hardy snaps open her fan, HIDING the bottom half of the two women's faces as Maria leans her ear in, and WHISPERS "Lord Melville." Maria snaps back to her seat and turns quickly to see Melville with SIR CHARLES WATSON making their way along Fop's alley.

Melville's eyes meet Maria's; she blushes and looks back to the stage. Melville's smile takes on the same leering suggestiveness as his father's. Sir Charles curiously follows his gaze to Maria.

SIR CHARLES

A propos, Melville, who is that immense fine girl at whom you are staring just now in the pit?

MELVILLE

The very woman Charles, of whom I was speaking to you last night. Don't you think her lovely?

SIR CHARLES

Lovely? She is enchanting--will you introduce me?

MELVILLE

With pleasure. She may be worth your attention, as you are at present unemployed.

Both men begin to move, with some difficulty considering the crowd, toward Maria's seat in the pit.

SIR CHARLES

Who, and what, is she? I never saw her before. Is she of fashion? She has that air.

MELVILLE

All I know of her, I learnt from Hardy's maître d'hotel. She is just come from the country, is alone in lodging and her name is Villiers.

SIR CHARLES

Alone in her lodgings? That circumstance is promising.

MELVILLE

She seems to me a little adventurer, who is looking out for men of a certain rank; I know not with what design, nor is it material. But you will best learn her views from herself.

The two young men finally arrive at Maria's seat and bow ceremoniously to the ladies. Lady Hardy cackles a fake laugh, extends her hand to be kissed, and fans herself. Maria smiles politely at Sir Charles, glances shyly at Melville, blushes again and looks down.

Throughout the following conversation, Maria will continue to steal shy looks at Melville, only to look away. As the conversation progresses, he becomes aware of her obvious infatuation and begins to focus his own attention on her, often looking at Maria when speaking to others.

MELVILLE

Your Ladyship, Miss Villiers, may I have the honor of presenting Sir Charles Watson.

SIR CHARLES

(executing another series of graceful bows)
Your Ladyship. Miss Villiers.

LADY HARDY

Sir Charles, Your Lordship, you honor us with your presence. Sir Charles, I do not believe we have met before.

SIR CHARLES

No, my Lady. But I have heard of the impeccable reputation of your house and its . . . guests.

MELVILLE

Yes, upon the sight of the divine Miss Villiers and her position en bon train with your Ladyship, Sir Charles made his way to your new dove's side posthaste.

SIR CHARLES

The charming Miss Villiers is certainly in good hands with such a chaperone.

At Lady Hardy's inclination, Maria extends her hand for a kiss from Sir Charles, taking her eyes off of Melville.

MARIA

Sir Charles, I am pleased to make your acquaintance and to have inspired such a kind praise in such a short time.

MELVILLE

(Cutting off Sir Charles from responding and bending to kiss Maria's hand himself) It is far too easy with one so angelic.

MARIA

His Lordship would flatter me. Tis, his Lordship who shows us the angel in our midst.

MELVILLE

(Still holding her hand)
On the contrary, my dear, to
you, I am incapable of anything
but the plain truth. How does
one play the coquette to the
goddess?

MARIA

Aphrodite must indeed have an
Adonis for the story to play.

MELVILLE

And I have indeed risen from the
dead by the spring of such a
presence.

As the THEATRE PATRON next to Maria rises from his seat,
Melville takes a vacant seat next to Maria. Sir Charles
watches the conversation between Maria and Melville unfold,
senses that Melville is a notch more interested in Maria
than he originally believed, and turns casually to converse
with Lady Hardy.

Melville leans in on his next line to whisper to Maria.
She blushes and leans forward as well, mistakenly thinking
that this body language suggests an intimacy that does not
exist.

The theatre's background noise FADES out here so that just
Maria and Melville's conversation is heard. The camera
angle also NARROWS so that only Maria and Melville are
shown.

MELVILLE

I must see you. I have thought
of nothing else. I must
confess, I must bend my knee—
forgive me, my love, I am too
blunt.

He starts to rise.

MARIA

Nay, stay, my Lord. Please
stay.

Melville sits back down, a smug air encompassing him.

MARIA

Perhaps we might sup late tonight. The opera is almost complete. I can make arrangements.

MELVILLE

I want nothing more than for to unburden my heart . . . I wish to be beloved, to seek an affair of the heart . . . I would be grateful for a time alone with you, if you would be gracious enough to allow it.

MARIA

My Lord, I have not the remotest doubt of your intentions, which I am most sure are dictated by the perfect honor. I will retire at once to my rooms and see to it that a late supper is readied.

Melville stands and assists Maria to her feet. The camera angle WIDENS slightly at this point to show other opera goers, several of whom have been watching Melville and Maria's intercourse. The background noise of the theatre also COMES BACK IN at this point.

Melville kisses Maria's hand again. Maria turns and curtsies individually to Lady Hardy and Sir Charles before hastily leaving the theatre. On her way out, she slightly jostles LADY BLAST, an established dowager of the ton. Lady Blast glares at Maria as she exits the theatre and then takes sharp notice of Melville exiting within seconds after her.

She glances back at the direction from which the couple originated and spots Sir Charles conversing with Lady Hardy. She nods ever so slightly to herself as if this sight confirms all her suspicions.

Sir Charles sees that he has attracted Lady Blast's attention. Lady Blast indicates with a twitch of her fan that she wishes for him to come over to her. Sir Charles makes his excuses to Lady Hardy, languidly rises, bows to Lady Hardy, and strolls across the room to Lady Blast.

Arriving at Lady Blast, Sir Charles bows over her extended hand as he kisses it.

SIR CHARLES

How does my beautiful aunt this evening?

LADY BLAST

Spare me your foppery, Charles. I am not some dairymaid come lately. Who is that rude young woman who took from the theatre with Lord Melville on her heels as if after something in heat?

SIR CHARLES

Ah, Auntie, I do so enjoy your witticisms. Your metaphors are always so delightfully and insultingly spot on. That charming young woman to whom you refer is Miss Maria Villiers.

LADY BLAST

And?

SIR CHARLES

I assume you wish for some sort of pedigree recitation . . . yes? Well, I must be honest—

LADY BLAST

A first.

SIR CHARLES

(Smiling as he takes the insult)
I only know what little knowledge I have gained from Lord Melville and her employ-her chaperone, Lady H.

LADY BLAST

A paragon of Lady Hardy's, hmmm . . . an adventurer with designs on his Lordship, then? He must have dismissed that Frenchwoman

(MORE)

LADY BLAST (CONT'D)

he brought with him from Paris
and taken this creature to
supply her place.

SIR CHARLES

I am not sure about that
interpretation. Miss Villiers
has such a look of innocence
about her—

LADY BLAST

Charles, you are rather too like
your father—you never depend on
faces.

Lady Blast extends her hand on her last line in a gesture of dismissal. Sir Charles smiles his acquiescence, kisses his aunt's hand, and heads back to Fop's Alley.

Lady Blast snaps open her fan as the two LADIES on either side of her lean in and a gossip session commences between the trio. Lady Blast makes clear her topic by gesturing toward the door through which Maria exited and a slight indication toward Lady Hardy. The camera then PANS up to the stage as the curtain begins to slowly come down and the scene FADES OUT.

INT. MARIA'S ROOMS AT MRS. MERRICK'S SAME NIGHT

Maria, dressed in a new gown with slightly less elaborate hair, stands in the middle of the room giving instructions to Mrs. Merrick. The sofa has been pushed completely against the wall and the low table in front of it removed. An elegant supper table for two has already been set up in its place.

MARIA

The table looks lovely, Mrs.
Merrick. Thank you for
preparing the room so quickly on
such short notice. I did not
realize I would have a friend to
sup with me tonight until after
I departed for the opera.

MRS. MERRICK

I am sure that Lady Hardy will
much approve of your little
supper party. I have prepared
some of her favorite dishes.

MARIA

(Distracted and somewhat
confused by the reference to
Lady Hardy) What? Oh, I am sure
she would approve of my guest,
and anything you have prepared
will be delightful.

Now, Mrs. Merrick looks puzzled, since the guest appears to
not be Lady Hardy as she suspected. But Mrs. Merrick has
too much respect for "her young lady" as she always calls
Miss Villiers to pry.

Mrs. Merrick curtsies to Maria and leaves the room.
Maria turns slowly around, scanning the rooms to make sure
that everything looks perfect for Melville's visit. She
pauses when she notices something sticking up from behind a
pillow on the sofa. Quickly crossing the room, she pulls
out her tragedy and looks momentarily confused as to what
to do with it.

Maria quickly crosses the room and jerks open the first
drawer of her dressing table. The camera CLOSES IN on
Maria's hands opening the drawer only to find it crammed
full of unpaid bills to milliners, hairdressers, etc. She
shuts it and opens the next drawer, only to find the same.
The last drawer REVEALS the exact same result. On this
last drawer, Maria tries to push some of the bills to the
back and grabs handfuls of them to throw on top of the
dressing table; she even removes her empty purse from the
last drawer and drops it on top of the dressing table. But
there is still not enough room to cram the tragedy in the
drawer. Frustrated, Maria leaves the front room.

While Maria is in her bedroom searching for something to put bills and/or tragedy in, the camera CLOSES in on dark mirror above the dressing table. As the camera moves in closer, what appeared to simply be a reflection of curtains across the room TAKES THE SHAPE of a woman. As the camera CLOSES in to a stopping point, it is clear that the image in the mirror is that of Mrs. Herbert, who upon realizing that the audience can now SEE HER CLEARLY, gives her somewhat elaborate wig a pat, smoothes the bodice of her gown, and smiles into the camera.

MRS. HERBERT

(Sarcastically) Well, with the state of that purse, it is certainly a fine thing that his Lordship intends to dine here tonight. After all, given her present situation, setting her love aside, procrastination in the production of her penmanship would be extremely inconvenient to her. And "Lady Melville's" play will certainly be received.

Maria reenters the main room with a large portmanteau. She walks swiftly to the tables and sweeps everything on top of the dressing table into the bag. In her effort to dispose of the mess, she fails to notice the image of Mrs. Herbert FADE slowly back into the curtains. She throws her tragedy on top, snaps the bag closed and shuts the bottom drawer of the dressing table before tossing her bag into the bedroom and shutting the door just as John enters the room and announces Melville's arrival.

JOHN

Lord Melville, Miss.

John bows slightly to Maria and moves out of Melville's path to close the door and take up his place next to it. Maria, slightly flushed, turns to greet Melville, who is wearing a different outer coat and waistcoat than those he wore at the opera. Maria gives a courtesy as he bows to her and presents her with a bouquet of roses.

MELVILLE

Flowers from my father's villa in Kent. I thought to offer something beautiful to one so beautiful but I see that they

(MORE)

MELVILLE (CONT'D)

are vicious weeds next to the
exquisiteness of your
countenance and dress.

MARIA

My Lord, you flatter me again.
I cannot be considered even
lovely next to the exquisitely
fancied dress of your Lordship.
As always, my Lord, you are in
all so superior to other men.

MELVILLE

It is so refreshing to meet with
woman of such infinite wit, Miss
Villiers.

MARIA

(Blushing slightly) Thank you,
my Lord. Shall we sit down?

Melville bows his agreement, and the couple sits down to
the table. Maria indicates with a wave of her hand that
John is to uncover the dishes on the table to begin the
first course. Melville eats with some gusto as Maria
daintily picks at her food.

MELVILLE

My dear, Miss Villiers,
everything is excellent. Your
cook must be French?

MARIA

No, my Lord.

MELVILLE

Surely, only a French cook could
prepare such a delectable sauce.

MARIA

My landlady, Mrs. Merrick, has
actually prepared our supper. A
good Englishwoman, I assure you.

MELVILLE

Well then, Mrs. Merrick has surpassed herself in the fashionable science of eating. I shall have to thank her for whetting my appetite for the delightful series of treats that I plan to enjoy this evening.

MARIA

I shall pass along your compliments, my Lord.

Seeing that Melville has finished the first course, Maria indicates to John to take the dishes. John DOES SO, rather noisily, and exits the room to fetch the next course.

MELVILLE

Alone at last, my dove.

MARIA

(Blushing) My Lord.

MELVILLE

I must confess seeing you tonight at the opera has brought me to the realization that the happiness of my future life depends on entirely passing it with you. Your person, air, conversation, your tout ensemble is exactly what my current condition calls for. You are so well formed, my dear Miss Villiers, to become an elegant style of life.

Maria blushes, looks abashed, drops a tear of tenderness and is unable to speak in the wave of emotion that overwhelms her. Melville, viewing this reaction as part of the game of negotiation, continues to press his case for gaining Maria as a mistress and lays out for her a carte blanche in respect to settlements. He leans in and takes her hand.

MELVILLE

I have already considered how to regulate my future household,

(MORE)

MELVILLE (CONT'D)

given certain prior family commitments. You shall, of course, my dove, have a grand house, an establishment entirely of your own. I am, I must confess, naturally liberal in expense, particularly with my pleasures.

Maria gives Melville's hand a small squeeze and leans in closer to him. By leaning in closer, Maria EXPOSES a small amount of décolletage. As she passionately declares her true feelings for Melville, she presses against the table, causing more of her breasts to press against and out of the bodice of her gown. Maria looks adoringly at Melville; Melville scans the cleavage now in view.

MARIA

My Lord, I have the most lively sense of your generosity and nobleness of sentiment. But I love your Lordship for yourself alone. I am so grateful for your offers toward our imminent union, but my love is first, my Lord. I am indifferent to every other consideration.

Melville tears himself away from staring at Maria's chest. Seeming to remember that he has not actually secured her as a mistress just yet and is still supposed to be seducing her, he looks in her eyes, smiles tenderly and places her hand against his cheek with his hand still resting on top of it.

MELVILLE

How then, my dove, would you like to proceed toward securing all the perfunctory items of our new estate?

MARIA

I must refer your Lordship to my guardi-

Just as Maria is about to refer Melville to Col. Dormer for an answer, the door to the room opens and COL. HERBERT enters. Col. Herbert is a very genteel man of about 25; he is tall with dark hair and eyes and is a powerfully built man, a sharp contrast to the beautiful, almost effeminate looks of Melville. Dressed in regimentals, Col. Herbert carries himself with an air of the most perfect ease and unconcern. He HUMS a part of one his favorite songs in Montezuma as he enters.

All three young people look at each other in complete surprise. Col. Herbert addresses Maria with the most respectful air.

COL. HERBERT

Can you forgive me, madam? I am new to London and am lodged in the house next to this one. Finding the street door open and the darkened interiors remarkably the same, I mistook these lodgings for my own. I am ashamed of my indiscretion, but you have nothing to fear from it.

A little embarrassed, Col. Herbert makes a hasty bow to Maria and hurries out the door without waiting for an answer. Both Maria and Melville stare stupidly at the closed door for a moment and then look to each other. It is then that Maria realizes her hand is on Melville's cheek. Letting it drop, she glances down in embarrassment and sees that given her posture, her dress is leaving little to the imagination. She sits up hastily. Melville frowns slightly at this reaction and leans back as well. He shifts slightly in his chair and uncrosses and then recrosses his legs so that he is turned somewhat away from Maria.

MELVILLE

What an odd tale at so late an hour.

MARIA

(Embarrassed and distracted)
Yes, my Lord. The hour is late.

Both Maria and Melville look at each other and then their empty plates. A baroque version of The Clash's "Should I Stay or Should I Go" BEGINS softly in the background, as Melville drinks the last of the wine from his glass and rises from the table. Maria follows suit and also stands quickly.

MELVILLE

Miss Villiers, I thank you profusely for the delight of your company this evening. I am deeply troubled that I must make my excuses and depart before the conclusion of such a pleasant meal and conversation. I have only just recalled that I must meet with my father within just a few hours before he departs for his seat in Yorkshire. I beg you to forgive my rudeness.

MARIA

Of course, my Lord, of course. We shall simply defer our supper and subject to another more favorable opportunity. I so thank your Lordship for the delight of your company.

Maria gives a slight curtsy in response to Melville's quick bow. As Melville leaves the room almost as fast as Col. Herbert did, the baroque background music RISES in volume and seamless SWITCHES over to a faster, pop/punk version of the same song. Maria wanders over to the sofa and sinks slowly into it, not minding her dress. Her skirts form a voluminous wall around her as she places her left elbow on her knee and rests her chin on her left hand. As she does so, her hair shifts off center and she doesn't bother to put it back into place as the scene FADES out.

INT. MRS. HERBERT'S DINING ROOM SEVERAL MORNINGS LATER

Mrs. Herbert sits at the head of the table in her dining room in London. The room is filled with sunlight. Mrs. Herbert daintily selects a piece of fruit and roll from a tray in front of her and places it on her plate. Noise from the streets of London can be HEARD as the front door OPENS. The noise causes Mrs. Herbert to glance up from her fruit selection at the main entrance to the dining room. The camera FOLLOWS her gaze and SHOWS MULTIPLE HERBERT SERVANTS carrying trunks and other baggage through the spacious foyer up the stairs. Mrs. Herbert's footman, HARRY, enters with several papers, letters and magazines. He approaches Mrs. Herbert, bows and presents the mail.

HARRY

Some of the most recent post
that has collected during your
time abroad, Madam.

MRS. HERBERT

Thank you, Harry.

Mrs. Herbert smiles and indicates that Harry is to place the mail on the table. He does so, bows again, and takes up his post behind her chair. Mrs. Herbert sips her chocolate and sifts through the mail, pulling out a copy of Bon Ton magazine. She flips through and randomly scans articles until something catches her eye. Almost choking on the sip of chocolate she is taking, she swiftly sets the cup on the table, accepts a napkin from Harry, and puts the magazine flat on the table, frantically reading the article to herself and then aloud at Harry's inquiry.

HARRY

Madam, are you all right?

MRS. HERBERT

"It has recently come to the
attention of this noble
personage that a certain
adventurer has integrated the
ranks of the bon ton. A Miss V-
ll-rs, the illegitimate daughter
of a Mrs. M-rr-ck, almost
succeeded in the delusion of
Lord M-, attempting to entangle
this young noble in an unsavory
affair with her low person."

Harry looks expectantly at his Mrs. Herbert, waiting the command he knows is coming. Mrs. Herbert snaps the magazine shut.

MRS. HERBERT

Noble personage, ha! I have known Harrieta Blast and her like since I was a young girl; there is nothing noble about them. Replete with gall, the whole slew of them.

HARRY

Lady Blast, Madam?

MRS. HERBERT

Yes, Lady Blast. Amongst all her other perfections, she is a pretty good scribbler and has more than once enriched such magazines with little anecdotes about friends and enemies alike— anecdotes which want no recommendations except the very useless one of being true.

Mrs. Herbert stands quickly from the table, giving instructions to Harry over her shoulder as he follows her.

MRS. HERBERT

Harry, ready my coach. And find Miss Villiers cards in that stack waiting on my desk. She is obviously in London and has called. God help her, I was out.

ACT III

INT. LORD CLAREMONT'S COACH SAME MORNING

As Lord Claremont leans back into the plush seat of his coach, it barrels through the streets of London and the screen splits from the top portion of the coach, SHOWING a distraught Melville. The screen with Melville is LIGHTER IN COLOR AND FUZZY AT THE EDGES to clarify the FLASHBACK.

Melville FACES the camera directly but is clearly speaking to his father and not the audience.

MELVILLE

You see then, my Lord, the offers I was proceeding to make to her when this extraordinary adventure of the stranger threw a damp on my emerging attachment—I mean, he mistook the house! This is very improbable. He might be a current lover, or at least favored enough to still be in her list of friends. Having no wish to become the dupe of the most infamous artifice, I am now without the least shadow of inclination toward Miss Villiers. But she will think me a man without the least sense of honor or gallantry, if I do not come to an explanation on a treaty which is in such an advanced state.

LORD CLAREMONT (O.S.)

I shall visit Miss Villiers myself, young Adonis. There shall soon be an amicable but absolute period to this languid and unmeaning negotiation.

From his position in the bottom, present screen, Lord Claremont glances out the window of his coach and RAPS heartily on the coach roof with the silver knob of his cane. The movement appears to PUSH Melville's top, flashback screen off. The coach slows and pulls to the side. A Claremont Footman opens the door of the coach, and as Lord Claremont emerges, it is clear that he is in front of Mrs. Merrick's house.

EXT. MRS. MERRICK'S HOUSE MOMENTS LATER

Lord Claremont's path up the steps of Mrs. Merrick's home is blocked by the Hairdresser, Milliner and Assistant, and Cordwainer from an earlier scene. All three merchants hold several bills in their hands and are angrily gesturing inside the house. John is blocking the entrance to the door. Lord Claremont pauses and watches the scene with amusement, the wheels of his devious mind ever turning. A jazzy version of Cyndi Lauper's "Money Changes Everything" PLAYS in conjunction with the STREET NOISE of London.

JOHN

No, no, no! My mistress is not accepting other callers right now; she is awaiting a specific caller and cannot be disturbed.

HAIRDRESSER

I am sure Miss Villiers is very busy impressing the ton with my creations; however, I am not so sure her "caller" will be impressed with the bills I plan to present him or her upon arrival.

MILLINER

Yes, perhaps her wealthy friends can pay her debts since Miss V— apparently has spent her pathetic little inheritance in order to earn their love.

CORDWAINER

(Evil chuckle) Oh yes, I think she will find them a most sympathetic bunch.

JOHN

This is ridiculous! You must leave at once, at once, I say. My mistress will not have you harassing her guests with such lies—

ASSISTANT

My mistress ain't lying! We got bills and debts too, you know. And we ain't got time for some little adventuring miss to sit up and her rooms and wait for the next lover boy lord to pay for a new hat.

At these words, all of the merchants begin to push against John again; this time with even more physical force. They are all SHOUTING at one time—the merchants demanding payment for goods and John refusing entry.

Lord Claremont appears to be bored now that the scene has simply cycled back to a stronger version of his original encounter with it. Yawning delicately into a lace handkerchief, he mounts the steps and TAPS his cane loudly on the step beneath the ruckus taking place by the door.

The merchants pause and turn in one angry body to address this newcomer to their dilemma. Seeing a lord, they stop their bickering and attempt to regain a semblance of composure. The Milliner and her Assistant look surprised, assuming John was simply lying about Miss Villiers expecting someone, unaware that the father rather than the son will be as much a surprise to her as it is to them. The Hairdresser and Cordwainer offer sycophantic smiles and bow lowly to his Lordship; after all, potential customers are everywhere.

Lord Claremont gives a slight wave of his hand and the merchants stumble over themselves to get out of his way. He ignores them and addresses John.

LORD CLAREMONT

Miss Villiers' man? Very good,
Lord Claremont to see Miss
Villiers.

JOHN

She is expecting a Lord Melville, your Lordship. She told me to deny anyone else.

LORD CLAREMONT

I'm sure. Lord Claremont, Lord Melville's father, to see Miss Villiers.

JOHN

Oh, yes, your Lordship. Please enter. I will announce you at once.

LORD CLAREMONT

How kind.

Lord Claremont enters the house as John holds the door open for and bows to him. John promptly shuts the door as the merchants simultaneously realize that this may be their opportunity and move to enter the house.

As the scene FADES OUT, the merchants begin BANGING on the door once more and the music GROWS louder over their shouts and knocking, cutting out completely as soon as the next scene CUTS to the interior of the house.

INT. MARIA'S ROOMS SAME MORNING

Maria sits in the same chair at the same table from her dinner with Melville. Her untouched breakfast rests in front of her while she looks on, with an almost frightened expression, at the chair where Melville sat.

John enters the room, and Maria jumps to her feet, panic mixed with longing overtaking her face.

MARIA

The post? Any cards? His Lordship surely has sent something—

JOHN

No, Miss. But—

MARIA

No! How it can it be "No, Miss"
again!

JOHN

Yes, Miss. But I am—

MARIA

Yes? Now you say, "Yes!" Do you
mock me, John?

JOHN

No, Miss. But I am to—

MARIA

Yes, yes, just go back to "No,
Miss" again, forever.

Maria, who has moved to stand in front of the sofa during her tirade, now sinks down on to it and begins to cry.

John waits just a moment to be interrogated again, sees that it may be safe to speak, and begins again.

JOHN

I am to announce—

LORD CLAREMONT

(Smirking as he enters) Lord
Claremont.

Maria's head snaps up, and she hastily wipes her eyes and jumps to her feet. Shocked by Lord Claremont's appearance, Maria forgets to curtsy and only manages to SNIFFLE loudly.

JOHN

(In a loud whisper) It's Lord
Melville's father, Miss.

MARIA

(Glaring at her footman, hisses)
I know that!

John manages a quick bow and exits, pulling the door shut behind him.

Lord Claremont executes a graceful bow to Maria, who remembers her own manners and gives a clumsy curtsy, followed by another loud SNIFF. Lord Claremont crosses the room and offers his handkerchief. Maria accepts it thankfully and BLOWS her nose rather loudly. Not sure what to do with it afterwards, Lord Claremont gestures for her to keep it. A soft, baroque version of Heart's "Barracuda" begins to PLAY in the background.

The easy politeness of Lord Claremont's address, for he is one of the best-bred men in the world, dispels all the apprehension Maria feels in the awkwardness of this moment.

LORD CLAREMONT

Miss Villiers, please sit. I so hate to see a lovely young woman in distress, particularly when I can be of any kind of service to her.

Maria smiles gratefully at Lord Claremont and takes a seat on the sofa. Lord Claremont looks around the room, spots the table and chairs, and selects the chair Melville used in the previous scene. Placing it a respectful but friendly distance opposite Maria, he indicates the chair with his right hand. Maria, realizing he is asking her permission to sit and join her, quickly motions for him to have a seat as well.

MARIA

Please, do sit, your Lordship. I apologize for my outburst. I was unaware of your arrival; it was most impolite to detain you in the hallway. Again, I do apolo-

LORD CLAREMONT

Shush, shush, my dear. Do not trouble yourself with such niceties. The formality of our world can be quite stifling, especially for the young, the so passionate of heart.

MARIA

Your Lordship is very gracious. Thank you.

LORD CLAREMONT

I attempt such a rapport with all young people—years of raising my son alone— you, as a dear friend of Lord Melville's, I am sure know that he lost his mother at a tender age—raising him alone has helped me to understand the whimsy of these early years. But, I must confess, I always find graciousness easier in the presence of exquisite female beauty and wit.

Maria blushes slightly and smiles shyly at Lord Claremont. He offers her a benevolent, almost fatherly smile in return.

MARIA

You remind me then, my Lord, of my uncle, another good man who understands and nurtures the whimsy of youth.

LORD CLAREMONT

A fine man, I am sure. He is not in London?

MARIA

Oh no, my Lord. My chaperone for the season is Lady Hardy. Her Ladyship says that you are old friends.

LORD CLAREMONT

Lady H, hmmm, yes, we are . . . acquainted. Her Ladyship is indeed a busy woman; it must be difficult for her to keep up with such a charming young woman as yourself. Pardon the liberty I take when I tell you, my dear, that you truly have a profusion of charms but may want the right friend to conduct you through the devious part of life.

MARIA

The right friend, my Lord?

LORD CLAREMONT

Yes, my dear. The world, at least, the whole world, is really about finding that person. As one who always wishes to come to the aid of my son's friends and companions, allow me to be that person. Depend on my cares to place you in the situation to which your beauty gives you the best possible right to pretend.

Maria smiles uncertainly. She is clearly trying to understand Lord Claremont's declaration in the scope of what she perceives as her looming engagement to his son. That attempt can only lead to failure, and the confusion is evident in her tone of voice.

MARIA

Thank you, my Lord.

The music FADES COMPLETELY OUT before the delivery of the next line.

LORD CLAREMONT

You are most welcome, my dear. But before we continue, first tell me, with that amiable sincerity which is vividly painted on your countenance, what is really the nature of your present connection with Lord Melville?

Assuming that the vivid crimson blush on Maria's cheek and the faltering of her voice when she attempts to reply confirm his understanding of Maria as an adventurer, Lord Claremont continues his harangue without waiting for her answer.

LORD CLAREMONT

I am sorry that such a tender intercourse as yours and his Lordship's should be so soon interrupted, for I know my son's intention was to have made a settlement on you for life, to have continued you as the mistress of his heart, though family considerations oblige him to give his hand to another.

Maria begins to interject repeats of Lord Claremont's phrases back to him throughout his explanation. Her blush grows stronger as her eyes widen. Her tone is one of such shock that it borders on sounding like polite chitchat.

MARIA

Heart? Mistress of his heart?

LORD CLAREMONT

I know, my dear, I know. Please be assured of the sincerity of Lord Melville's attachment, and of the extreme difficulty I found in convincing him of the imprudence of the step in which his passion almost seduced him.

MARIA

Seduced him?

LORD CLAREMONT

And of course, Lord Melville's marriage with Miss Harding, which is to take place in a few days, would render the continuance of your connection highly improper. It has become absolutely necessary to put an end to it.

MARIA

Marriage?

LORD CLAREMONT

As the person dearest to Lord
Melville, I have come to convey
his most passionate adieux.

Lord Claremont paused for another reply from Maria. She only continues to stare at him. Smiling indulgently, Lord Claremont continues.

LORD CLAREMONT

But there is hope, my dear. You have made quite the conquest of Sir Charles Watson, I hear. And this young man, much less worldly than Lord Melville, may even, if you play your cards right, change the rosy fetters of illicit Love, for the more durable and more respectable ones of Hymen. I will tomorrow give a supper, of which you shall be the heroine, and invite Sir Charles to be of the party. In the meantime . . .

Lord Claremont pauses to smile reassuringly again at Maria and to take out his pocket-book and offer her a banknote with a graceful extension of his hand.

LORD CLAREMONT

Lord Melville, entreats you, madam, as a grateful acknowledgement of that amiable partiality he must for the future unwillingly decline, to accept this note for five hundred pounds, which I have the honor to present you in his name.

From the mention of Lord Melville's marriage to Miss Harding, an excess of resentment and surprise renders Maria incapable of expressing what she feels at this humiliating discourse. Wounded to the soul that the most amiable of men wanted little more from her than to be his kept-mistress, Maria sighs slightly, finding her own native consciousness of worth supporting her.

Maria makes a declining and no less graceful wave of her hand and offers a smile of ineffable disdain in the direction of Lord Claremont's bank note.

Lord Claremont, truly believing her ambitions to be as his son described, looks somewhat awed by the air of dignity Maria assumes.

MARIA

I am too sincere, my Lord, to dissemble; nor would dissimulation avail with a man of your Lordship's discernment and knowledge of the world. Both Lord Melville and myself have been mistaken; I, in imagining him a man of honor; he, in supposing me a woman devoted to infamy.

Lord Claremont, still holding the banknote, actually wears a look of confusion. Unused to being unsure in any situation, he shifts slightly in his seat under Maria's unwavering glare.

MARIA

I am unknown to you, my Lord, which is your only excuse for what I have just heard; but from this moment learn to respect a woman whose family is not inferior to your own, whose virtues do not disgrace her birth, and whose error in this instance is owing only to her youth.

At the mention of her family's worth, tears swell up in Maria's eyes and fall silently down her cheeks. It is not the loud, dramatic cry of her outburst at the scene's start, but rather a quiet cry of anger and frustration.

MARIA

Your Lordship must necessarily observe the present agitation of my mind, and the painful effort I make to behave as becomes me; and therefore have, I am

(MORE)

MARIA (CONT'D)

convinced, too much politeness
to prolong a visit which cannot
but be extremely embarrassing to
us both.

LORD CLAREMONT

Miss Villiers, I am sorry if I
have offended you . . .
regardless of my understanding
of your intentions or
background, you are indeed a
woman of . . . spirit.

Lord Claremont rises, places the banknote in his pocket-
book and makes a slight bow to Maria. She remains seated
and looks up at him with a withering glare.

LORD CLAREMONT

Given the circumstances, I could
not agree more strongly with
you, Miss Villiers that there is
a definite propriety in
shortening the remainder of our
visit today.

As Lord Claremont delivers this last line, Mrs. Herbert
enters the room followed by a sheepish John and the ever
patient Harry.

MRS. HERBERT

I couldn't agree more myself, my
Lord.

JOHN

(Still standing behind Mrs.
Herbert, yells around her) Mrs.
Herbert, Miss.

Lord Claremont turns to see Mrs. Herbert and, out of habit,
attempts a bow.

LORD CLAREMONT

Mrs. Herbert?

Mrs. Herbert moves out of the doorway and sweeps her arm to
gesture toward it, moving the footmen behind her with the
same motion.

MRS. HERBERT
My Lord, weren't you leaving?

Attempting to regain some composure, Lord Claremont bows again to Maria and once more to Mrs. Herbert and exits the room.

INT. MARIA'S ROOM SAME DAY

The camera shows a CLOSE-UP of Maria's face, breathless with joy at the sight of her friend (at a time when a friend was most necessary) before slowly ZOOMING OUT to show both women and servants within the room.

Mrs. Herbert looks at Harry and raises her eyebrows; this small sign is enough to elicit a bow from her footman who exits the room. Mrs. Herbert looks at John; John, one stocking beginning to creep down his calf and wig askew, continues to simply stand and wait for actual instructions. Harry reenters the room, grabs John's arm, and leads the old footman out.

Mrs. Herbert sighs, rolls her eyes, shakes her head slightly and turns to Maria, who has risen from the couch.

MRS. HERBERT
My dear Miss Villiers, need I
say how charmed I am to see you
in town and yet how concerned to
find you here unchaperoned?

MARIA
My dear madam--no words--

MRS. HERBERT
Yes, my dear, many words. Many
words will be necessary to
explain all this--

Mrs. Herbert hands Maria the copy of Bon Ton Magazine and watches as Maria turns a sickly shade of pale after reading the article about herself. Maria opens her mouth to speak twice but is incapable of even forming words. She slowly sinks back down to her spot on the couch as the magazine falls into her lap.

MRS. HERBERT

Maria, my dear girl, given what I witnessed with his Lordship, I know you have a glimpse of the borders of the precipice on which you stand, but you do not know it in all its horrors. The human mind, impelled by its own relentless nature, fond of the marvelous, and ever seeking food for that curiosity which carries us to so much good and so much evil, imbibes with eagerness the animated tale of slander, because animated.

MARIA

(A whisper to herself) Why did I leave my household gods? They alone are the certain guardians of female honor.

MRS. HERBERT

And there you have hit upon it—I do not think that town agrees with you. And so, we shall leave it. I will send off one of my servants this moment to apprise my mother-in-law, Lady Sophia Herbert, that we intend to visit her villa for three or four days. It is about twenty miles from town and shall provide the necessary respite and regrouping we need.

Mrs. Herbert makes sure her cloak is secure and adjusts her gloves. She is clearly about to depart to make arrangements for the women's intended trip.

Maria absently nods agreement throughout the end of Mrs. Herbert's last line and then right before the other woman exits, Maria "comes back to herself."

MARIA

Of course, a trip to the country
would be most lovely, Mrs.
Herbert. But I must write Lord
Melville of my intentions first.

Mrs. Herbert stops at the door, turns and looks at Maria,
and then turns to DIRECTLY ADDRESS the camera.

MRS. HERBERT

Henrietta Blast herself would
almost pity this.

Mrs. Hebert TURNS AWAY from the camera and back to Maria,
removes her cloak and gloves, and crosses the room. She
gestures for Maria to move over on the couch and then seats
herself next to her, GIVES a patient sigh and begins her
counsel.

MRS. HERBERT

I beg your pardon, my dear Miss
Villiers, but to whom did you
need to write?

MARIA

Lord Melville. He has a right
to be heard in his own defense.

MRS. HERBERT

I believe the burden of
inconsistency in your
relationship would relieve you
of the need to feel any such an
obligation.

MARIA

But the human heart is
inconsistent. I admit, I am
tender, but is this not a virtue
rendered meritorious by his
virtues? Virtues which it would
be profane even to doubt?
Clearly, he does not know what
his father or this horrible Lady
Blast have done.

MRS. HERBERT

Forgive me, my darling girl, but what kind of romantic nonsense are you babbling on about?

MARIA

Lord Claremont—he obviously made his visit here today to break the union of two enamored hearts. Two hearts so perfectly formed for each other that they have inspired jealousy and division, even in verse.

MRS. HERBERT

Maria, this is not a tragedy of lovers walled in by their guardians' deviousness. You are not pining for Romeo atop some balcony; you are in the most improper situation imaginable—alone, in a lodging, entertaining men like his Lordship. You are not just the target of Lady Blast's inventive genius; you are the object of her malice.

Maria again grows pale as Mrs. Herbert's words sink in; with too little art to hide her feelings, her eyes slowly start to fill with tears. Mrs. Herbert, seeing Maria's distress, stops her lecture and pats Maria's hand.

MRS. HERBERT

It will all be resolved, my dear. But you must allow me to fill the role which you originally sought for me: a true chaperone. We will restore the bright polish of your fame, which has been a little injured due to this indiscreet connection. Come morning, we will be en route to Lady Sophia's where I will introduce you to my sincerely delightful

(MORE)

MRS. HERBERT (CONT'D)
mother-in-law, a shrine of
honor. You will be under her
protection, and no one will
doubt your own propriety of
character.

Maria, holding Mrs. Herbert's hand, smiles gratefully and
nods her agreement. Mrs. Herbert gives Maria's hand a
gentle squeeze, releases it and begins to rise.

MARIA
Lady Sophia and her home sound
so wonderful. But—

MRS. HERBERT
(Hesitating mid-rise from the
couch) But?

MARIA
There is the business of my
tragedy to address before
lengthy countryside visits can
be made.

MRS. HERBERT
Tragedy?

MARIA
Oh no, not my own personal
tragedy, but my masterpiece, my
tragedy.

Maria, with a sudden burst of energy, jumps to her feet and
rushes to the closed French doors which hide her
bedchamber. Throwing open the doors, the camera REVEALS
piles of expensive dresses on the bed, several wigs and
hats on stands scattered throughout the room, and shoes
littering the floor. Ignoring the costly mess which
obviously shocks Mrs. Herbert, Maria rushes to a small
dresser and rummages through a drawer until she locates her
leather journal. Pulling it out quickly, she holds it up
triumphantly to the perplexed Mrs. Herbert, who along with
the camera FOLLOWS Maria into the bedroom.

MARIA
My tragedy!

She opens the journal and begins a "reading" for Mrs. Herbert, exaggerating the male voice as ridiculously low and the female voice as on the verge of tears.

MARIA

Eliza Goode: But, you cruel and vile man, my virtue will be rewarded. Count Biceillo: No, my dear, you will be brought low by my lustful ambitions. And then Eliza says, But though life be very, very bad, I am still-

MRS. HERBERT

Good?

MARIA

Have I read you this scene before?

MRS. HERBERT

Yes, I'm sure. I forgot your . . . talent, as a writer. May I see your script?

Maria happily hands her work to Mrs. Herbert, who flips through, reading a few sections of the play.

MRS. HERBERT

Oh my, what an interesting fable, the conduct such as the severest judgment must approve. May I take this with me to read in full? I am sure some of my acquaintances will know of just the theatre and audience for it.

Maria's face radiates with a warm smile as tears stream down her cheeks; she nods enthusiastically at Mrs. Herbert's suggestion. Unable to contain her enthusiasm and gratefulness for her friend's work on her behalf, she rushes over and embraces the slightly discombobulated Mrs. Herbert.

Recovering from her initial shock at this outburst, Mrs. Herbert smiles and pats Maria on the back as the scene
FADES OUT.

EXT. MRS. MERRICK'S HOUSE MOMENTS LATER.

Mrs. Herbert descends the steps in the front of the house to her waiting coach. Harry smiles and looks at her expectantly, politely waiting for her orders on their next destination.

Taking his proffered hand, Mrs. Herbert, who has Maria's journal tucked in the crook of her free arm, steps into the coach and gives her instructions.

MRS. HERBERT

I have seen my lamb—now to the lion's den. Lady Blast's townhouse, Harry.

HARRY

Yes, madam.

INT. LADY BLAST'S TOWNHOME SAME DAY.

Lady Blast, wearing an elaborate day gown and a wicked smile, sits at a writing desk in an ornate drawing room. Due to the angle of her desk, her back is to the fire roaring in the huge fireplace. Above the ornate, gold accented mantel is a huge oil painting of Lady Blast in a deep blue gown, wearing, what appears to be, every diamond and pearl she owns. The painting gives the impression that she is "looking down" upon anyone who enters the rooms (even herself).

She adds the finishing touches to another piece of slanderous writing as CLAUDIA, a young maid, enters.

LADY BLAST

What is it, Claudia? I do not like to be interrupted during the writing process.

Claudia bites her lip, shuffles a bit, and does not budge from her spot in the middle of the room.

LADY BLAST

Oh, what am I saying? I am sure in that marvelously dense head of yours, you cannot possibly grasp the intricate process of creating scandal. Well, what is it?

CLAUDIA

(Slight pause to make sure her
mistress is finished) Oh, right
. . . very good, your Ladyship.
A Mrs. Herbert is here to call
on you, my Lady.

Claudia smiles, clearly pleased with herself for remembering the caller's name, and drops a curtsy.

LADY BLAST

Herbert, Herbert, ah yes, Emily
Herbert, of course. She married
Lady Sophia's stepson. Yes,
well, show her in, Claudia.

CLAUDIA

Yes, my Lady.

Claudia exits and reenters shortly thereafter with Mrs. Herbert following her. A baroque version of Pat Benatar's "Hit Me with Your Best Shot" PLAYS softly in the background and CONTINUES throughout the scene.

CLAUDIA

Mrs. Emily Herbert, my Lady.

Claudia curtsies and departs quickly. Lady Blast rises from her desk and walks toward Mrs. Herbert. Both women curtsy to each other simultaneously, and Lady Blast indicates that they are to sit upon one of the drawing room's sofas and chairs which face each other.

LADY BLAST

Please, sit, Mrs. Herbert.

Lady Blast RINGS a small bell as Mrs. Herbert sits, and Claudia reenters, looking confused.

LADY BLAST

Tea, Claudia.

Claudia nods and exits swiftly.

LADY BLAST

To what do I owe the pleasure of this surprise visit? I do not believe I have seen you at all this Season.

MRS. HERBERT

I have been on the Continent.

LADY BLAST

How lovely. Was the weather good?

MRS. HERBERT

It was. But I return home to find clouds on my horizon.

LADY BLAST

Was there a storm on the Channel on your return voyage? How dreadful!

MRS. HERBERT

No, not an actual storm. More one of a metaphorical sense.

LADY BLAST

Metaphorical?

MRS. HERBERT

Yes, you know, a metaphor. I am sure a writer of your talents, Lady Blast, is familiar with such rhetorical devices.

At this last line, Mrs. Herbert neatly unfolds and smooths the article from Bon Ton Magazine that she has concealed in the folds of her dress. She places the piece of paper on the table between the two women and looks at Lady Blast with an unreadable expression.

LADY BLAST

I do not know what you mean, Mrs. Herbert.

MRS. HERBERT

Oh, I think you are well aware of my meaning. I am certainly very attentive to yours.

Lady Blast shifts uncomfortably and reaches for her bell to summon Claudia back.

MRS. HERBERT

That will not be necessary; my point is brief. While I have been away for most of the season, it appears that you have made the acquaintance of a dear friend of mine, although your impression of her is flawed, to say the very least.

LADY BLAST

You say, Mrs. Herbert, that your point is brief. Well, let's have it, then.

MRS. HERBERT

You will print a retraction of this article. You will pay for that retraction to be in bold lettering on the front pages of this magazine and several other publications, which I have listed on the back of your . . . article. In addition, you will gather your set together and correct the malicious lies which you have spread about Miss V--.

LADY BLAST

(Giving a short, hard laugh) I will do nothing of the sort.

MRS. HERBERT

Oh, I think you will. You may remember a . . . situation a few
(MORE)

MRS. HERBERT (CONT'D)

years ago, an Oriental girl,
impregnated by certain Lord.
You must have heard about it! I
know how you love to keep
abreast of all of the news of
the Ton. They never named the
Lord in all of those lovely,
slanderous columns. He must
have been very powerful to keep
it so hushed. Or perhaps, his
Lady wife . . . well, it doesn't
really matter now. Except,
something funny that my husband
mentioned once. You remember,
my late husband? I believe he
and Lord Blast were members of
the same club. Yes, yes, it is
all coming back to me now. You
know how the men are when the
cards run late and the brandy
has been poured a little too
liberally—why, they're worse
than a bunch of gossiping old
hags.

During Mrs. Herbert's monologue, Lady Blast has grown paler
and paler, as her lips have drawn tightly together and her
posture has become even more rigid. Meanwhile, Mrs.
Herbert smiles and discusses her subject quite
conversationally, enjoying Lady Blast's growing agitation.

MRS. HERBERT

Lord Blast mentioned to my
dearly departed love a love of
his own, a passion of an Eastern
flavor. You know, not to change
the subject, but I've always
wanted to experiment a little
with my own pen. Perhaps, you,
who have so much experience in
the words of calumny, could
offer some advice?

LADY BLAST

What do you want?

MRS. HERBERT

An investigation of truth, a
withdrawing of the veil which
covers all of your falsehoods.
Print the retractions. Send out
your calling cards. It is time
for a little forthrightness, an
unusual companion for you, I
know.

Mrs. Herbert rises and Lady Blast simply looks up, stunned.

MRS. HERBERT

Please do not trouble yourself.
I will see myself out.

As Mrs. Herbert exits, Claudia enters carrying a tea tray. The camera SWITCHES ANGLES to SHOW Mrs. Herbert's face as she exits the drawing room and LADY BLAST'S FOOTMAN closes the door behind her. The sound of Claudia SCREAMING and tea dishes being THROWN and BROKEN against the door can be heard as Mrs. Herbert exits the foyer with a little grin on her face. Simultaneously, the music's volume INCREASES dramatically as it MORPHS into the original song with Pat Benatar's vocals SOARING through the chorus.

EXT./INT. DRIVE LEADING TO LADY SOPHIA'S VILLA/MRS.
HERBERT'S COACH FOLLOWING MORNING

The morning is cold with frost on the grass and trees but full of light and incredibly clear with a crisp blue sky. Lady Sophia's villa is a large, white structure that seems to almost glow in the bright morning sunlight. A soft version of Belinda Carlisle's "Heaven Is a Place on Earth" on classical guitar PLAYS in the background.

The camera CUTS from the estate and landscaping to SHOW Maria's face looking through the glass of the coach. She looks up in awe at the large structure as the coach pulls up and circles in the front drive.

As Maria seems to remember herself and sits back in the coach, the camera CUTS to the interior of the vehicle.

Mrs. Herbert and Maria, heavily cloaked against the cold, sit facing each other in the coach. The camera CUTS BACK AND FORTH between the two women during their conversation.

MRS. HERBERT

It is a beautiful place, isn't it?

MARIA

(Rushing into her compliment, at first) Yes, it is so large and pleasing and—I mean, it is delightful.

MRS. HERBERT

It is large and pleasing, and it is "delightful" to see that you still retain some the sweet enthusiasm for life that first drew me to you at Rutland.

Maria, blushing, looks down. Mrs. Herbert smiles indulgently at her.

The door to the coach is opened by Harry, who not completely visible yet to the screen, offers his hand to the ladies.

MRS. HERBERT

Come, my dear. Lady Sophia is eager to make your acquaintance.

Mrs. Herbert takes Harry's hand and descends from the coach. Maria sighs to herself, settles her shoulders back and does the same.

EXT. LADY SOPHIA'S VILLA SAME MORNING

The camera PANS UP from Maria and Mrs. Herbert standing in front of the coach to SHOW LADY SOPHIA'S SERVANTS forming a aisle leading up the steps into the house. LADY SOPHIA stands at the top of the steps in a pale blue gown with a rich matching cloak wrapped around her. She is impeccably "put together" in her dress, wig and accessories but nothing is overdone as shown in the London Season scenes earlier; the effect has an appeal of effortlessness to it.

The camera slowly ZOOMS IN on a CLOSE-UP of Lady Sophia's head and upper torso. Lady Sophia is a tall, shapely blonde in early 50s. The beauty of her face is intensified by the gentleness of her spirit. She has an air which shows her birth to be most distinguished: an air which would have been commanding, had not its impression been softened by the smile of undissembled goodness. Her countenance speaks, in the most expressive language, that calm sunshine of the soul which is the happy monopoly of virtue.

Mrs. Herbert and Maria ascend the steps to Lady Sophia. When they reach Lady Sophia, Mrs. Herbert drops a small curtsy. Lady Sophia smiles warmly at both women and embraces Mrs. Herbert who returns the hug. One can sense a sincere affection between the two women.

LADY SOPHIA

Daughter, it is so good to have you home. And I am so pleased that you have brought your dear friend with you.

MRS. HERBERT

My Lady, I am, as always, so thankful for your presence. May I present my friend, Miss Maria Villiers?

Maria drops a low curtsy to Lady Sophia and rises slowly, peeking somewhat bashfully up at her as she stands up. The camera CUTS to Lady Sophia's face to show her smiling at Maria. She reaches out and gently raises Maria's chin up so she is looking at Lady Sophia fully. She cups her chin lightly and then leans forward and kisses Maria on the cheek.

LADY SOPHIA

Welcome to Greenwood, my dear Miss Villiers. I hope you will find it impervious to the snares of town. We have always prided ourselves here as being a safe place to fall.

MARIA

Thank you, my Lady. I am del .
. . I am grateful for your hospitality.

Lady Sophia links her arms through both Maria's and then Mrs. Herbert's and leads her two guests through the villa's large French doors. During this exchange, as the scene FADES OUT, Belinda Carlisle's vocals of "Heaven Is a Place on Earth" ARE HEARD over the classical guitar. Music FADES COMPLETELY OUT with scene.

INT. LADY SOPHIA'S DRAWING ROOM EVENING, THE SAME DAY

Lady Sophia, Mrs. Herbert, and Maria sit around a small card table, following dinner, playing a game of loo. The women are all dressed nicely with costly fabrics, but the gowns are simple, their hair is their own and a minimum of jewelry is worn. The furnishings of the room are similar to its occupants—expensive but tasteful.

A large oil painting over the fire place's mantel shows a young Lady Sophia with Col. Herbert as an infant on her lap and Mr. Herbert as an eight-year old leaning against his stepmother's shoulder. It is a domestic scene reminiscent of Vigee Le Brun's "Marie Antoinette and Her Children."

The room and the women are in sharp contrast to the gaudy décor of Lady Hardy's or extravagant interiors at Lady Blast's.

LADY SOPHIA

Tell me more of your childhood
in Rutland, Miss Villiers.
Emily seemed to so enjoy her
visit there this past summer.
She wrote often of visiting your
Belfont and how much she
treasured the time spent with
you and your family.

MARIA

It really is a charming place, a
peaceful place. I am so blessed
that my dear uncle, Col. Dormer,
took my sister and me in after
the deaths of our parents.

LADY SOPHIA

Oh yes, what a kind man. It is
difficult to raise children by
(MORE)

LADY SOPHIA (CONT'D)
oneself. I had to find that strength myself after the death of my husband. I have witnessed in my dealings with "all the world" children cast aside in such scenarios, never experiencing real love and affection. I am afraid it perpetuates a certain "type" amongst the Ton.

MRS. HERBERT
My mother-in-law succeeded beautifully in raising both my late husband and brother-in-law up to be good, solid men—a sharp contrast with the maukish, unmeaning macaroni faces about town.

LADY SOPHIA
Well, my inclination, and quite frankly my dears, the mediocrity of my fortune preserved me from mixing much in the Ton.

At Lady Sophia's comment regarding her fortune, Maria looks surprised and glances around the clearly "fortunate" room. Seeing her confusion, Lady Sophia laughs gently.

LADY SOPHIA
Most of my husband's estates and goods were inherited by my stepson. When he passed, he rightly left a generous jointure to Emily. The remainder of his estate went to my son, who despite my remonstrations, felt that as a single man, he did not need the fullness of the fortune and divides his yearly allotment with me.

MRS. HERBERT

My brother-in-law is a colonel
in the army. He is a true
gentleman, whose pride is much
more interested in my Ladyship's
appearance than his own.

Immediately following Mrs. Herbert's last line, Harry
enters the rooms and all three women look up, surprised at
the intrusion. He bows low and stands up.

MRS. HERBERT

Harry, I am surprised at you!
Did I not give strict orders
that we were to be denied?

HARRY

Madam, I apologize for the
intrusion. My Lady, Miss
Villiers, forgive me, but there
is a visitor that I know you
will want to see immediately.

At the conclusion of this announcement, Col. Herbert enters
the room, dressed in the exact same uniform as the night he
entered Maria's rooms by mistake. In fact, his entire
appearance is uncannily similar, so much so that it looks
as if he walked out of that scene directly into this one.

COL. HERBERT

Forgive Harry, ladies. It is
truly my fault that your cards
have been interrupted.

Upon hearing and seeing her son, Lady Sophia's face breaks
into a radiant smile as she quickly rises and moves toward
him. As she does so, a very faint baroque rendition of
Bonnie Tyler's "I Need a Hero" PLAYS in the background.

LADY SOPHIA

Son! What a wonderful
interruption! You will never be
denied.

He takes her proffered hand and kisses it; still holding her hand, he leans in and places a light kiss on her cheek as well. Lady Sophia looks on adoringly as he repeats this same greeting with Mrs. Herbert. Having greeted both his mother and sister-in-law, Col. Herbert turns at his mother's gesture to meet and greet Miss Villiers, who has remained seated.

The camera SHOWS first Maria's and then Col. Herbert's face as they clearly recognize each other from the embarrassing encounter in Maria's rooms. Maria looks absolutely horrified and, in her effort to cover up her embarrassment, stands up too quickly and sends her chair toppling backward. She attempts to right it but when she bends over, discovers that it is caught in the hem of her gown.

Col. Herbert looks shocked at seeing Maria, a woman he believes is of low moral fiber, to say the least, in his mother's drawing room. But too trained in manners and diplomacy to do otherwise, he quickly crosses the room at her distress with the chair and tries to help her. During this exchange with correcting the chair, the camera closes in on their faces--their eyes meet and lock for just a second as they stare deeply at each other, both trying to scope out the intent of the other.

This moment is not lost on Lady Sophia or Mrs. Herbert. The camera CUTS to them following the CLOSE-UP of Col. Herbert and Maria. The two women exchange knowing looks and move closer to the flustered young people.

LADY SOPHIA

Miss Villiers, may I present my
son, Col. John Herbert.

Having finally disentangled and righted the chair, Col. Herbert and Maria both stand up straight. Col. Herbert bows to Maria as she slowly curtsseys. During this interchange, the music abruptly STOPS playing in the background.

COL. HERBERT

Miss Villiers, it is a pleasure
to have returned to my mother's
home during your visit. I am
charmed to make your
acquaintance.

Watching Col. Herbert's face closely, as they both stand back up to their full heights, Maria breathes a slight sigh of relief at her realization that Col. Herbert has no plans to reveal his initial meeting with her to the group, at least, not in this moment.

Maria, however, still continues to look pale and nervous. She feels Col. Herbert's delicacy concerning her and is charmed by it, but it humbles her as well. For the first time, Maria realizes that there is a moment in her life for which she really does have occasion to blush. Her pale skin takes on a decidedly pink hue as she thinks in what light she must appear to Lady Sophia's son.

LADY SOPHIA

Miss Villiers, are you well?
Your coloring has changed
rapidly.

Not wanting to lie to a woman she respects immensely, Maria simply stands rooted where she is, opens her mouth to say something, and then closes it again.

MRS. HERBERT

Perhaps, you are just tired,
then? We did have a lengthy
journey this morning and it is
growing late.

Maria smiles gratefully at Mrs. Herbert and nods her accord.

COL. HERBERT

Please do not let my unannounced
arrival keep you from your
sleep, Miss Villiers. If you
are tired, I insist you retire.

MARIA

Thank you for your
understanding. I am pleased to
make your acquaintance, but I
fear that my travels today have
just this moment overwhelmed me.

LADY SOPHIA

Please, my dear, sweet girl,
sleep well. Harry will light
you to your rooms.

Harry, who has been waiting by the door throughout the scene, picks up a small candelabra from a table near the door.

MARIA

Good night then. I pray that everyone rests well.

Maria gives a slight curtsey and exits the room behind Harry. The scene FADES OUT.

INT. LADY SOPHIA'S DRESSING ROOM NEAR MIDNIGHT, THE SAME EVENING

Wearing a warm, rich dressing gown, Lady Sophia sits at her dressing table, brushing her hair and examining her face in the mirror. A small cup of tea, steam rising from it, rests on the table. The room is dimly lit but its appearance is warm and cozy; there is nothing sinister to its darkness.

A KNOCK is heard on the door, and Lady Sophia glances at it quizzically.

LADY SOPHIA

Who is it?

Col. Herbert opens the door a bit and sticks his head into the room. He still wears his uniform.

COL. HERBERT

It is I, Mother. I am sorry to disturb you so late, but I knew you would still be awake. And I feel I have a confession, of sorts, to make.

Smiling indulgently at her son, Lady Sophia picks up her tea cup, swivels on her stool and gestures for him to enter the room and have a seat on a chair now facing her.

LADY SOPHIA

I believe I told you earlier today, Son, that your interruptions are not to be
(MORE)

LADY SOPHIA (CONT'D)

denied. Now, what is this confession I must hear at the midnight hour? I am afraid we may have to rename our Surrey home Strawberry Hill if such visits become a regular occurrence.

COL. HERBERT

I apologize, Mother—

LADY SOPHIA

Son, even as a paragon of Virtue, I do tease occasionally.

Col. Herbert grins at his mother and finally seems to relax in posture as he sits across from her.

COL. HERBERT

I must confess that I have already met Miss Villiers.

LADY SOPHIA

Oh, you have? Well, she is a beautiful young woman who has been spending the season in London. I am sure that you may have seen her at certain events.

COL. HERBERT

She is indeed very beautiful; it is what I first noticed about her, and what made that meeting so strange.

LADY SOPHIA

Is it strange to meet pretty girls in London? I wouldn't mention that in any London drawing rooms, if I were you.

COL. HERBERT

I am afraid I didn't meet Miss Villiers in such normal circumstances.

(MORE)

COL. HERBERT (CONT'D)

Being new to town and renting rooms in a building remarkably similar to Miss Villiers, I mistakenly barged into her rooms one night thinking they were mine.

LADY SOPHIA

Well, no wonder you two were so disconcerted this evening.

COL. HERBERT

It is not as simple as even that. There was a man, a Lord, in her rooms. They appeared to be . . . intimate with each other.

LADY SOPHIA

Oh yes, I know all about that.

COL. HERBERT

So you see my shoc--You know all about that?

LADY SOPHIA

Yes, I know that Miss Villiers is as amiable as she is lovely, and that she is a woman of perfect honor; but with all the fire, and I am sorry to say, all the indiscretion of the very opposite character.

COL. HERBERT

Forgive me, Mother, but I do not understand.

LADY SOPHIA

Miss Villiers traveled to London alone, intending for your sister-in-law to serve as her chaperone for the Season.

COL. HERBERT

But Emily as just now returned
from France.

LADY SOPHIA

Ah, there is the rub. When
Emily first wrote to me of her
desire to visit Greenwood, she
told me in length of the
beautiful, the amiable, and the
very naïve Miss Villiers, who
fell in with a certain set,
wholly engrossed by play,
intrigue and scandal. So
particularly devoted to the
first, that they see the
approach of the genial spring
with horror. It is with these
people that she met said young
Lord. I assure, my Son, she has
done nothing inappropriate, only
foolish. And we will let her
youth serve in her defense.

COL. HERBERT

I am glad then, Mother, that
Emily had the forthrightness to
bring her here. But, what of
her family, her guardian? What
sort of man suffers his charge
to trek to London, unescorted
without guarantee of proper
chaperone?

LADY SOPHIA

Given what both Emily and Miss
Villiers have said of her uncle,
Col. Dormer, I am surprised as
well—

COL. HERBERT

Col. Dormer! Let me understand,
Mother: did you say that Miss
Villiers is the niece of Col.
Dormer?

LADY SOPHIA

I did.

COL. HERBERT

You have no idea, my dear Mother, how happy you have made me. I began my military life a cadet of seven years old in Col. Dormer's regiment; he is the man on earth to whom I am most obliged.

LADY SOPHIA

I am glad then, Son. You two will have much to talk of on the morrow.

The scene FADES OUT with Lady Sophia smiling at her son and sipping her tea following her last line.

EXT. THE GROUNDS OF GREENWOOD EARLY AFTERNOON, THE FOLLOWING DAY

Maria takes a walk about the estate. The day is cold, as evidenced by Maria's thick cloak, gloves and muff, but it is also clear and sunny. Col. Herbert exits the house and scans the landscape below the villa. Seeing Maria, he makes his way to her. Sensing someone behind her, she stops and turns. Seeing Col. Herbert, who gives her a friendly wave, she reluctantly waits for him to overtake her.

COL. HERBERT

Miss Villiers, please excuse my interruption. I seem to be saying that a great deal to people lately. But I wanted to discuss a mutual friend of ours with you.

Maria immediately has a guarded expression and stiffens in posture, fearing that Melville's name will be the next thing on Col. Herbert's lips.

COL. HERBERT

Mother tells me that you are the niece of Col. Dormer?

MARIA

(Visibly relieved) Why, yes. Do you know my uncle?

COL. HERBERT

Yes, very well. He was my commanding officer for many years. I have the utmost respect for him; he has without a doubt been the greatest influence on my military career.

MARIA

What a kind and generous compliment. I will certainly tell him of your arrival here in my next letter home. I am sure your presence here will give him comfort to know that I have even more reassurance of right action in coming to Greenwood.

Maria looks for a moment as if she will cry but suppresses the emotion and smiles a little too brightly. Col. Herbert senses her distress. The baroque version of "I Need a Hero" softly PLAYS once again.

COL. HERBERT

We are all happy that you have chosen to retire here for a while. I've always found it to be a good position to rest, to catch your breathe, maybe to find your way back to yourself, if that makes any sort of sense. I am not a poet, and yet, it seems to be a place that requires a poet to describe it.

Maria watches Col. Herbert's face while he makes this little speech. There she finds the same sincere compassion which marks his mother as such a striking individual. Col. Herbert is warm, open, undisguised himself; it is almost impossible to have disguise with him. He is one of those rare persons who have the happy art of gaining, not only your friendship, but your confidence in a moment.

MARIA

I am ashamed, Colonel, in the face of such kindness and openness to own I have seen you before, and feel most sensibly your delicacy in not appearing to recollect a circumstance so little to my honor.

COL. HERBERT

Miss Villiers, you do yourself a disservice. Your candor now shows the openness of your own heart. I am humbled that you would view my simple courtesy with such favor.

MARIA

You say I am candid, yet my indiscretion, of which you are the sole witness, does not merit this delicacy. I must appear to you at present in a very unfavorable light. And as I have the most ardent desire of convincing you I am not unworthy of your esteem, I will beg you to hear me with patience whilst I explain to you every little particular in respect to my acquaintance with Lord Melville, whom I blush to own I did love, and whom perhaps I do not yet think of with the indifference I ought.

COL. HERBERT

It has been my experience, Miss Villiers, that a woman seldom owns a passion till it ceases to exist.

MARIA

Perhaps, Colonel. You see, I believed the splendor of all the Ton's equipage, and my ambitions had much too large a share in the partiality I felt for the world and people I have so recently quit. I am embarrassed of my little history, and yet, know I must own it if I am to move forward.

COL. HERBERT

Such sincerity of heart will certainly meet with success in such an endeavor.

Maria smiles shyly at Col. Herbert, who offers her his arm. Taking his arm, Maria follows his lead back to the house.

COL. HERBERT

I know, Miss Villiers, you will continue to chastise yourself for a time; I can see you are a woman of fire. But this keenness will ultimately show you the way through current events. The persons of the Ton rarely inspire a lasting affection; sensibility alone is the food of sensibility.

The camera slowly PANS OUT AND UP from the couple walking back to the house and FOCUSES on an upstairs window, where Mrs. Herbert IS SHOWN looking down on the pair with a sly smile on her lips. The music FADES OUT as the camera angle MOVES INSIDE the room in the next scene.

INT. MRS. HERBERT'S DRESSING ROOM MOMENTS LATER

The scene SWITCHES from the outside of the window to inside the room as Mrs. Herbert MOVES AWAY from the window and resumes her seat opposite Lady Sophia. The women enjoy tea and the warmth of a fire in the small hearth.

MRS. HERBERT

Well, my Lady, I think that we shall soon bury the memory of Lord Melville.

LADY SOPHIA

Yes, I had a late night chat with my son this past evening. When he found Miss Villiers to be not only a woman of honor, but also the niece of his friend, her charms appeared to redouble with luster.

MRS. HERBERT

He seems determined to gain her . . . friendship, at the very least.

LADY SOPHIA

Ah, daughter, her friendship? How are we mislead by words without meaning? It is her love to which I feel he aspires.

MRS. HERBERT

(Glancing back toward the window) And appears resolved to gain.

LADY SOPHIA

Yes, well now that Miss Villiers has successfully extracted herself from the Ton, perhaps my son can extract the love of their gilded cage from her heart.

MRS. HERBERT

I pray so, my Lady. But . . .

LADY SOPHIA

But? What is it, daughter? Surely, this is the very reason you have brought her here.

MRS. HERBERT

In part, my Lady, in part. On the day of my initial call on Miss Villiers in London, I noticed an extravagance of trappings—dress, shoes, wigs and the like—littered about Miss V's rooms.

LADY SOPHIA

You mentioned earlier an inheritance that enabled her to travel to London. You know how young women with a little coin and no supervision can behave. I am sure the poor lamb has spent every penny on pretty fabrics and ridiculous hairdressings.

MRS. HERBERT

Yes, and I am afraid quite a bit more than that which the inheritance lent itself. I recognized a particular cut of one of the gowns on her bed and made some inquiries of the dressmaker. It appears Miss V owes money all over town.

LADY SOPHIA

Oh my, the poor dear!

MRS. HERBERT

I spoke briefly with her man John about the situation, and he said that various merchants have been hounding the doors of Mrs. Merrick's for weeks, demanding payment.

LADY SOPHIA

I assume, my dear girl, that you have a plan where our poor Miss V did not.

MRS. HERBERT
Alas, bless her, she did have a
plan.

LADY SOPHIA
Splendid! What shall be done?

MRS. HERBERT
She planned to marry a confirmed
rake who wanted her only for his
mistress and—

LADY SOPHIA
There is an "and"?

MRS. HERBERT
And have her tragedy produced to
rave reviews and for significant
profit.

LADY SOPHIA
A tragedy? For the stage?
Well, have you read it? Perhaps
this may indeed be the saving
grace of her little excursion.

MRS. HERBERT
Oh, yes, my Lady, I have indeed
read it.

Mrs. Herbert rises from her seat and goes over to a small writing desk near the window. She removes Maria's leather journal and takes it to Lady Sophia. Handing it to her mother-in-law, she sits and waits patiently while Lady Sophia skims a few pages. Lady Sophia's face clearly reveals the lack of quality of the piece. After a moment, she stops reading, looks up, and LETS OUT a long sigh. A baroque version of Aretha Franklin and Annie Lenox's "Sisters Are Doin' for Themselves" PLAYS softly on harpsichord in the background.

LADY SOPHIA
What, my dear, is your plan?

MRS. HERBERT

My trip abroad was not as costly as I had anticipated; therefore, I do have some extra funds on which I have immediate access. I propose to pay Miss V's debt myself.

LADY SOPHIA

I had a strong suspicion you had formulated just such a thought. But, and while I think your generosity a noble thing, do you not feel that such a swift salvation for such a foolish venture, does not land her back exactly where she started?

MRS. HERBERT

I could not agree with you more, my Lady. Which is why I am not giving her the money.

LADY SOPHIA

I am afraid, I must admit that I am little perplexed, daughter.

MRS. HERBERT

I shall return to the Continent for the following Season and Miss Villiers shall accompany me as my paid companion. She shall "work" off her debt and actually learn how to navigate the waters of this world a little bit.

LADY SOPHIA

Splendid, indeed! Such a long trip abroad will be the perfect addition to a lengthy engagement.

MRS. HERBERT

Engagem . . . Ahhh, yes, a
European tour will ensure a
lovely, but modest, trousseau.

Both women CHUCKLE quietly and sip their tea companionably as the music SWITCHES from the baroque harpsichord to a jazz piano version of "Sisters Are Doin' It for Themselves." Aretha Franklin's vocals ARE HEARD softly as the camera slowly CLOSES IN on the still open journal on Lady Sophia's lap.

With this CLOSE-UP of the open page, the lines of text MORPH into an outdoor scene and the journal "FRAMES" the next and final scene. As this scene BECOMES CLEAR the music FADES BACK IN as a soft baroque version of Foreigner's "Waiting for a Girl Like You" on classical guitar.

EXT. BELFONT A BEAUTIFUL EARLY SUMMER DAY, A YEAR LATER

As the scene COMES INTO FOCUS in its journal frame, the camera SHOWS a wedding banquet underway. Maria and Col. Herbert and Louisa and Montague sit at the center of a long banquet table that has been set up in Belfont's elaborate flower garden. The couples, dressed in wedding attire with the girls in beautiful but simple white gowns and with their natural hair down and interlaced with flowers, are flanked at the table by Col. Dormer, Lady Sophia, Mrs. Herbert, Mrs. Merrick, and Montague's father.

Young people from the original scene with Mrs. Herbert sit at smaller tables spread around the garden. The music for the scene is provided by a classical GUITARIST hired to play for the event; he continues to PLAY a baroque version of Foreigner tune begun at the fade-in from the previous scene.

The newlyweds only have eyes for each other as they both feed each other bits of cake and steal kisses and embraces throughout the opening moments of the scene,

At a signal from Col. Herbert, the guitarist FINISHES his song and moves away from the table. Col. Herbert stands as a small troupe of ACTORS make their way to the clearing formerly occupied by the guitarist. Maria looks up at her husband with a puzzled expression.

COL. HERBERT

On behalf of Mrs. Herbert (he smiles down at Maria) and myself, we would like to thank all of our dear family and friends for bearing witness to the Montague's and our most special day—

MONTAGUE

(Raising a toast and smiling largely) Here, here!

The guests all LAUGH and SHOUT their approval, raising glasses in response to the impromptu toast. Col. Herbert LAUGHS and does the same.

COL. HERBERT

And as we enjoy this delicious meal and lovely setting, I have a special gift for my new bride. And while it is her noble sincerity and the feelings of her heart which have riveted my chains forever, I know, as you all know, that she is most possessed of a deep genius for the written word as well.

Maria blushes deeply at her husband's praise. He takes her hand kisses it and gives it a little squeeze. At vocal encouragement YELLED from the audience of guests, he also places a gentle kiss on her cheek. Maria, still a little pink with embarrassment, raises her eyes to look at him as he continues his explanation.

COL. HERBERT

My deep gratitude to my lovely sister-in-law for sharing my wife's tragedy with me, and thus, allowing me the opportunity to offer its performance as a wedding present to my love.

MARIA

(Clearly shocked) What? Emily .
. . Oh, my. (Turning to Col.
Herbert) Oh, my love.

COL. HERBERT

I now give you "The Tragedy of
Miss Eliza Goode."

After indicating for the actors to begin, Col. Herbert takes his seat. Maria squeezes his hand. Louisa, who sits at her left, taps her sister on the shoulder and the twins lean in to whisper to each other. The camera CLOSES IN on the two girls' faces and the noise of the scene FADES under their loud whispers.

LOUISA

Oh, sister, your tragedy to be performed at long last! I know it is not on the grand stage of London as you thought it would be—

MARIA

No, no, but this, this way is truly delightful.

LOUISA

But perhaps, since you will be a lady of the country with your mother-in-law at Greenwood, you could start a new literary career.

MARIA

(Laughing lightheartedly) A new career?

LOUISA

Yes, yes, you should write novels!

Louisa sits back up and the camera now only shows Maria's face, which TURNS and DIRECTLY ADDRESSES the camera with a look of newfound inspiration.

MARIA

Write novels? What a delightful idea!

Maria SITS UP as well; as the scene FADES OUT from a slow PANNING DOWN the length of her dress to REST on a bouquet at her chair's side. A baroque version of Whitesnake's "Here I Go Again" PLAYS. As the scene GOES COMPLETELY to the credits, the music MORPHS into the metal power ballad version of the song.

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