

AFTER THE FAIR

A NEW MUSICAL

**Book & Lyrics by Stephen Cole
Music by Matthew Ward**

Based on a story by Thomas Hardy

AFTER THE FAIR-ACT ONE

(After the prelude we hear Edith Harnam's voice remembering)

EDITH

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE THERE COMES A MOMENT
WHEN THE MUSIC AND THE LIGHTS COME TOGETHER
AND NOTHING CAN EVER BE THE SAME

(As the house lights dim, in the dark we a beautiful tune that turns to calliope. A maid named Anna appears excitedly She is a young pretty girl of about 18-20. She is so excited by the sounds and the sights just outside her window that she is practically jumping up and down.)

ANNA

I KNEW IT! I KNEW IT!
CALLIOPE'S DON'T LIE!

(There is another burst of "fair music".)

IN ALL MY YEARS, I NEVER...
IT'S THE FAIR! IT'S THE FAIR!

(She is now competing with the music and lights outside her window)

OH___

_____!

I CAN'T WAIT TO GO!
MY WAGES ARE ALL GONE
BUT IT'S WORTH IT FOR THIS DRESS

(she gasps)

I HAVE TO GET PERMISSION FROM THE MISTRESS!

(She exits.)

(We hear ominous music and see the Harnham House. It is a shadowy, dusty, cobweb-filled Victorian room in country house. Not to say that the house is not well kept or that the master isn't well off. It is a metaphoric dust that envelops the lives of the people who dwell here. It is hard to ascertain whether there is any life, until suddenly An unsettling rumbling sound is heard and a wind blows a curtain apart revealing a small shaft of light. The light reveals two wing chairs, occupied by an old man and a middle aged woman. The man is dozing, but the woman is having trouble resting. The rumbling jerks the old man awake. He is Arthur Harnham, a prosperous wine merchant in his sixties)

ARTHUR

(As if from a nightmare. He has heard Anna in the other room.)

Edith! Anna! Anyone!

EDITH

(She is his wife. A handsome woman in her forties.)

Yes, dear?

ARTHUR

(He grabs the bottle of wine and pours himself a glass)

WHAT IS THAT RUMBLING I HEAR?

EDITH

IT'S NOTHING, DEAR
GO BACK TO SLEEP

ARTHUR

I WASN'T SLEEPING

EDITH

OF COURSE NOT!

ARTHUR

(Looking out the window in surprise.)

WHEN DID THAT ROUNDABOUT APPEAR?

EDITH

IGNORE IT, DEAR
GO BACK TO SLEEP

ARTHUR

I WASN'T SLEE...

(But his head falls and he dozes)

EDITH

(Looks at him)

MY MISTAKE

(She begins to get comfortable and we hear some off-stage laughter. Arthur is jerked awake)

ARTHUR

WHAT WAS THAT?

(He dozes again, but she is fully awake now.)

EDITH

(She gets up from the chair, sings sarcastically.)

NOT A BLESSED THING
PUT YOUR FEET UP, HEAVEN KNOWS
THAT WE SHOULDN'T LET SOME RUMBLING
DISTURB OUR LITTLE DOZE

(She opens the curtain, lets some light in and peers out. Behind her we see the lights of a country fair. She yearns.)

IT'S JUST THE WORLD AT MY WINDOW
DISGUISED AS THE ANNUAL FAIR
AND AS USUAL, I'M ON THE INSIDE
WHILE THE WORLD IS ALWAYS SOMEWHERE OUT THERE
BUT IF THE WORLD'S AT A DISTANCE
IT PROVES THAT AS YOU SOW YOU SHALL REAP
AND WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR OWN BED
THEN IT'S NATURAL THAT HE SHOULD SLEEP

(Anna enters the sitting room in a simple country dress, complete with jacket and hat. But she holds her feather duster. She looks out of the window.)

ANNA

IMAGINE
IMAGINE!
A ROUNDABOUT TO RIDE
THE COLORED LIGHTS ARE BECKONING
THE FAIR! IT'S THE FAIR
OHH
I JUST HAVE TO GO
A MAID IS MADE TO WORK
BUT TONIGHT I AM BUSTING
PERHAPS I NEED TO DO A LITTLE DUSTING

(She sees Edith in her chair and goes over to her and purposely begins to dust her.)

EDITH

This chair is occupied, Anna.

ANNA

Oh, Mum. I'm sorry.

(She hits the back of the chair and a cloud of dust rises.)

Funny, no matter how much I dust, it never seems to go away.

EDITH

Now you know the story of my life. (*Seeing Anna's dress for the first time*) Anna, why are you dressed like that?

ANNA

(very manipulative)

Like what? Oh, I didn't even notice.

(the calliope music getting louder)

EDITH

SHH, ANNA!

ARTHUR

(almost waking)

WHAT?

EDITH

COME, ANNA

ANNA

YES?

EDITH

CAN YOU HEAR IT, CAN YOU FEEL IT?

ANNA

WHAT?

EDITH

CAN'T YOU FEEL THE SURGE
IN THE WALLS AND THROUGH THE FLOORS?

ANNA

YES.

EDITH

IT'S GOOD TO KNOW THAT SOME THINGS
CAN'T BE DROWNED OUT BY HIS SNORES

(she pulls back the curtain again and lets the light in. It is brighter than before and the

fair lights in the background are even more vivid and colorful)

EDITH

COME SEE THE WORLD AT MY WINDOW

ANNA

(joining Edith at the window, still manipulating.)

YOU'RE RIGHT MUM, IT'S SOMETHING TO SEE
AND I'M SURE IT'S ENOUGH JUST TO LOOK ON IT
AND DREAM OF ALL THE FUN IT COULD BE

BOTH

BUT THERE'S A CRACK IN THE WINDOW
AND IT'S LETTING IN THE SOUND OF THE FAIR

EDITH

(making a decision)

ANNA, YOU BE MY EYES
GO AND BRING ME A PRIZE
AND SOME AIR

ANNA

Oh, Mum! Really? You want me to go to the fair?

EDITH

Yes, Really, Anna.

ANNA

Well...if you insist.

(Edith laughs as Anna runs off for her new hat. She hasn't been fooled.)

EDITH

Wake up, Arthur. It's time to go to sleep.

(He doesn't waken, but the scene shifts to the fair, where Charles Bradford, a young handsome barrister looks for willing wenches. His scene and the house stay lit now together.)

CHARLES

(a light hits Charles at the Fair. He is Prince Charming.)

THERE'S A WORLD THEY SAY WITH NO GAVEL AND NO BENCH
AND IF I'M AWAKE TO FIND I MAY FIND A WILLING WENCH

ANNA

(babbling as Edith laughs)

And who knows? I may even meet the love of my life there!

CHARLES

AND SHOW HER THE WORLD

(By now the stage has been filled with light, except where Arthur sits. The lights of the fair are bright and bold in the background and the other three others are drawn to the world.)

EDITH

(Anna and Edith brush away the cobwebs.)

GO TO

ANNA

(Simultaneously with Edith)

I'LL JOIN

BOTH

THE WORLD AT MY WINDOW

ARTHUR

(mumbling in his sleep. Half awake. Half asleep. The fair keeps jarring him.)

SHE THINKS I'M SLEEPING

EDITH

AND SEE WHAT THERE IS THERE TO SEE

ARTHUR

I HAVEN'T SLEPT SINCE 1859

ARTHUR

ANNA

CHARLES

EDITH

THAT BLASTED WE'RE GOING TO SEE THE I'D SHOW HER THE BE PART OF THE

ALL

WORLD AT MY WINDOW

EDITH

AND I'LL BE THERE VICARIOUSLY

ALL

(The song coming together, bigger and brighter, just like the lights of the fair, except for Arthur, whose light dims to a spot from above just illuminating him in his chair, as if the shutters have been closed and locked.)

AND IF IT'S JUST FOR THE MOMENT IT MORE THAN ENOUGH FOR ME NOW

ARTHUR

DAMNED WORLD

TRIO

FOR IT IS SOMETHING THAT I CAN HOLD ON TO WHEN

ARTHUR

DAMNED FAIR

TRIO

I RETURN FROM THE WONDER OF NOW BACK TO THEN

ARTHUR

MY PRAYER IS JUST AS IT'S BEEN KEEP THE WORLD AT

TRIO

(simultaneously)

WHEN I AM BACK WHERE I'VE BEEN

ALL

WITH THE WORLD AT MY WINDOW AGAIN

EDITH

(After the applause. Anna goes to the Fair and Edith makes a choice.)

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE THERE COMES A MOMENT

(Arthur grunts and almost wakes up)

Don't wake up, Arthur. I am just going to go and see what is keeping Anna.

(We are now at the fair. We see Anna looking at the sites and then see Charles. The site he looks at is Anna. He tips his hat offers her a ride on the roundabout. She mimes jumping up on a horse. He watches. Edith enters and watches the two young people. As she drops a glove, Charles picks it up and gives it back to her. Their hands touch for a moment. Charles returns his attention to Anna but Edith is galvanized by the moment.)

EDITH, ANNA & CHARLES

(As a round.)

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE THERE COMES A MOMENT
WHEN THE MUSIC AND THE LIGHTS COME TOGETHER
AND NOTHING CAN EVER BE THE SAME

(Anna and Charles kiss passionately)

EDITH

IT'S JUST THE WORLD AT MY WINDOW...

ANNA

(coming out of the kiss)

I KNEW IT!

ANNA & CHARLES

I KNEW IT!

ARTHUR

(Consults his pocket watch, yawns and exits)

DAMN FAIR....

(There are fireworks and a huge burst of fair music and we are taken a few hours later as Anna and Edith literally almost bump into each other getting home from the fair)

ANNA

Oh!

EDITH

(thinking on her feet)

Anna! I was just about to come and see where you have been so late.

ANNA

Oh, I wish you had, mum! It was wonderful! Never in my life has I had such a time.

EDITH

The syntax is negligible, but I do understand.

ANNA

Oh, mum, thank you so much for letting me have the night out.

EDITH

I was glad to do it, Anna.

ANNA

Good. I need tomorrow afternoon as well.

EDITH

Oh, you do, do you? Why?

ANNA

I want to go out and practice my writing in my copy-book. You know how I long to be a good student.

EDITH

Somehow that does not have the ring of truth to it. Anyhow Mr. Harnham will expect you to serve our dinner. No, Anna. I don't think it's advisable for me to be too permissive.

ANNA

Yes, mum. Of course, mum. You are right, mum.

EDITH

Then it's settled.

ANNA

(Coyly changing the subject.)

But you should have come along, Mum. There was fireworks.

EDITH

Really?

ANNA

OH MUM, YOU'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A SIGHT
IT'S QUITE BEYOND COMPARE
THE SPECTACLE OF IT ALL
TO CALL IT A FAIR
JUST AIN'T FAIR

THE AIR WAS ALL FILLED WITH THE STEAM BARREL ORGAN
THE CLANGING OF GONGS
THE RINGING OF HAND-BELLS
BUT AS BRILLIANT AS IT WAS TONIGHT
TOMORROW WILL BE TWICE AS BRIGHT
AND I CANNOT WAIT FOR THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR

EDITH

THE DAY AFTER?

ANNA

THE NIGHT WAS AGLOW WITH THE LIGHTS OF THE CITY
THE PLEASURE MACHINES
THE SWINGS AND THE SEESAWS
BUT AS THRILLING AS THE EVENING SEEMS
TOMORROW WILL BE IN MY DREAMS
CAUSE I'VE GOT A DATE FOR THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR

EDITH

I SEE

ANNA

NOW NOTHING CAN COMPARE
TO THE STEAM ROUNDABOUT
THE WONDROUS CAROUSEL
MY FAVORITE RIDE
THE RISE AND THE FALL OF...

EDITH

THE HORSES

ANNA

THE TRUMPETS

BOTH

THE DRUMS AND THE CYMBALS

ANNA

AND A MAN BY MY SIDE

EDITH

A man?

(The music changes to a carousel in the background as Charles appears and she is part of the scene. A few hours before.)

ANNA

Yes, Mum, a man.

CHARLES

How pretty you look up there on that horse.

ANNA

Thank you, sir.

CHARLES

Do you mind if I ride along side of you?

ANNA

Not at all sir.

EDITH

Anna, I'll wager you don't know one thing about his life. What he does where he lives, even his name.

ANNA

Oh, I do know his name.

CHARLES

The name is Charles. Charles Bradford.

ANNA

HE CAME FROM LONDON
WHERE EVERYBODY LIVES WHO LIVES AT ALL
HE LIVES IN LONDON

CHARLES

BUT I PREFER THE COUNTRY

ANNA

DID I MENTION HE WAS TALL?
OH, MUM YOU'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH A MAN

EDITH

I CAN SEE

ANNA

HE'S QUITE BEYOND COMPARE

EDITH

THROUGH YOUR EYES

ANNA & EDITH

A GENTLEMAN TO HIS TOES

ANNA

WELL BRED TO THE CORE

EDITH

HURRY UP! TELL ME MORE!

ANNA

(Knowing full well that she is not boring her.)

Oh. I hope I'm not boring you, Mrs. Harnham.

WE WALKED,

CHARLES

NO WE DANCED

BOTH

THROUGH THE STEAM CIRCUS PROPER

ANNA

THEN FAR FROM THE CROWD

HE FOUND US A SHADOW

THEN HE BEGGED A KISS.

HE SAID IT WOULD

DO ME NO HARM

CHARLES

AND ME SOME GOOD

(Edith has heard this line before.)

ANNA & CHARLES

WE PROMISED TO MEET THE DAY AFTER THE FAIR

EDITH

THE AIR WAS ALL FILLED WITH THE STEAM BARREL ORGAN

THE CLANGING OF GONGS THE RINGING OF HANDBELLS

ANNA

BUT AS BRILLIANT AS IT WAS TONIGHT

TOMORROW WILL BE TWICE AS BRIGHT

So?

EDITH

So? All right, Anna. You can have tomorrow as well. Now tell me the lot.

ANNA

THEN THE STEAM ROUNDABOUT
STARTED WHIRLING AGAIN

EDITH

(getting into it.)

TO THE CLANGING OF GONGS
AND THE SHOUTING OF MEN

CHARLES

AND I LIFTED HER UP
ON THE PRETTIEST STEED

ANNA

AND I THOUGHT I WOULD FAINT

EDITH

FROM HIS TOUCH?

ANNA

NO, THE SPEED
BUT HE STOOD BY MY HORSE
WITH HIS ARM AROUND MY WAIST

BOTH

AND I KNEW I COULD LEARN HOW TO CARE

ANNA

FOR THIS GENTLEMAN

EDITH

FROM LONDON

ANNA

JUST HERE

ALL THREE

FOR A DAY OR TWO TO VISIT

ANNA & CHARLES

AND WE'RE
LOOKING FORWARD TO TOMORROW
MORE THAN WE CAN SAY

(Charles exits)

ANNA & EDITH

(They are now dancing in each other's arms and whirling about.)

FOR MOST PEOPLE RECALL
THE DAY OF A FAIR BEST OF ALL
BUT I SHALL REMEMBER THE DAY
AFTER THE FAIR

(Blackout. As the lights come up, the dinner table rolls on for Sunday dinner. The table is very long. Arthur sits at one end and Edith at the other. There is a large candelabra between them. The background is fields and hills as if there were a large picture window behind the table instead of a boring tapestry. The country is just outside and that is where Charles and Anna are having their tryst.)

ARTHUR

I hope you enjoy this claret, dear. I selected it myself.

EDITH

(A bit too impatiently. Her mind is on Anna & Charles.)

I know that you are a wine merchant, Arthur, but once in a while I'd like to choose something from the cellar. I actually might enjoy making a choice.

ARTHUR

(trying to make a joke)

Who was it who said you should choose a wife or claret for their body not their clarity.

EDITH

(without laughing)

I think it was you

(tinkling her bell)

Where is Polly?

ARTHUR

Polly? Isn't this Anna's day to serve.

EDITH

Oh. I gave her the afternoon off. She had an important engagement.

ANNA

(appearing in the field)

Oh no, it was no problem at all getting a holiday.

ARTHUR

First the fair and now this. Mrs. Harnham, you treat that girl as if she were your child, not your servant.

EDITH

(a sore spot)

I know that she is not my child. There is just you and me...and your business of course.

ARTHUR

They found my wine taster drunk this morning.

EDITH

Occupational hazard I suppose.

ARTHUR

What?

ANNA

Mrs. Harnham, she's the woman I work for, she mostly lets me come and go as I please. She's my only friend in the world. Except for Cook and Polly.

ARTHUR

Well I suppose, that one mustn't whine with dinner. Wine with dinner? Oh...I made a joke. Ha Ha Ha. Yes, well...

ANNA

If truth be told, I think that I'm her only friend too.

CHARLES

Really?

ARTHUR

The fact remains that you are too growing too close that girl.

ANNA

Of course, we've known each other since I was a small child. Mrs. Harnham, she was Miss Whyte then, well. My aunt worked for her father who was the Estate Manager for his Lordship.

EDITH

I promised her Aunt that I would look after her. And I do enjoy teaching her to read and write. Although she is slow to learn.

ANNA

And her being without children, Mrs. Harnham I mean, (my Aunt had five), she thinks of me as her own.

ARTHUR

Edith, you know how I feel about the mixing of the classes. Politeness is one thing, but remember, we are not, after all...Americans.

(She puts her arms out and Charles helps her off with her jacket.)

EDITH

I see.

(She steps out of her skirt and begins untying her petticoats.)

CHARLES

I see. And her husband. Who is he?

ANNA

Why, Mr. Harnham of course.

EDITH

Some wine, please.

ARTHUR

All I want from Anna is for her to serve me my dinner and keep the dust off the furniture.

ANNA

He's a rich old wine merchant.

EDITH

Yes, dear.

ANNA

But if truth be told, I don't think she cares much for him.

EDITH

Pass the wine.

(make him get up and walk the length of the table to pour for her)

ANNA

(taking the pin from her hat.) Do you like this hat? It cost fifteen and nine.

CHARLES

It's a very pretty hat.

(She hands him the hat.)

ARTHUR

(Admiring the scent of his wine.)

Now, a servant should be like a glass of wine. There when you need it.

ANNA

I think so too. Mrs. Harnham says that it's dead common. But then she doesn't have to know everything...does she? *(As the two go down to make love Arthur yawns loudly)*

ARTHUR

Ah, there is nothing like a good...claret.

EDITH

Yes, dear...

(The light hits Edith as she steps away from the table and looks at Arthur still babbling.)

IS IT BETTER TO SET AN EMPTY TABLE
WITH A SOLITARY PLACE
OR LOOK ACROSS A CANDELABRA
INTO AN EMPTY FACE?
CLOSE RACE

ARTHUR

There's a certain bouquet to this vintage I got...

(He trails off; his mouth still moving. Edith looks at the life she wanted and comments.)

EDITH

I GOT JUST WHAT I ASKED FOR
JUST WHAT I DESERVE
I MIGHT HAVE STUCK IT OUT
AND WAITED FOR ROMANCE
I JUST DIDN'T HAVE THE NERVE

SO I HURRIED AND MARRIED
MUSTN'T PASS YOUR PRIME
THE WEDDING MADE ME TRUST
THAT LIFE WAS FIN'LLY JUST
IF ONLY JUST IN TIME THAT LIFE GIVES PRECISELY
THE THINGS WE DON'T WANT
IS NOT MY REGRET.
WHAT'S SADDER TO ME IS
THE THINGS THAT I GOT
ARE JUST WHAT I WANTED TO GET.
THIS IS JUST HOW I PLANNED IT
EDITH AS A WIFE
THO' OTHERS MAY HAVE MORE
A MAID ON EVERY FLOOR
CAN JUSTIFY MY LIFE
AND WHO KNOWS
SOMEDAY I MAY SEE SOMETHING
JUST LOOKING ACROSS AT HIS FACE.
AND SO DESPITE DISILLUSIONS
I'M LOOKING AND WAITING,
JUST IN CASE

ARTHUR

So I told him it was sour...but of course nothing ever happens...

EDITH

JUST IN CASE SOMETHING HAPPENS...
WHAT IF THAT YOUNG MAN
WHO TOUCHED ME
EXQUISITELY
TOUCHED ME AGAIN?
WITH HIS ARMS AROUND ME,
THAT BEAUTIFUL YOUNG MAN
WOULD ASK ME TO MARRY HIM.
AND THO I AM TAKEN,
I WOULD RUN OFF AND MARRY HIM
AND EACH DAY AWAKEN
TO THE SITE OF A LONDON MAN
WHO IS VERSED IN THE ART
OF MAKING LOVE TO THE BODY
AS WELL AS THE HEART

(Charles appears and they dance erotically...when he leaves her fantasy, she is flushed.)

ARTHUR

Edith, are you all right? You're positively flushed. You should go to bed and take a nap. I know that's what I am destined for.

(He exits)

EDITH

OF COURSE I'M DESTINED TO NEVER KNOW HIM
OR REST IN THE WARMTH OF HIS GLANCE
FOR I'VE CHOSEN THE PATH
AND I'M WED TO A FUTURE
THAT NOTHING CAN EVER REPLACE

YES, THAT WAS JUST WHAT I WANTED
AND THOUGH I AM CERTAIN
THAT LIFE WILL GO ON AS IT MUST
I'LL KEEP ON HOPING
JUST
IN CASE

(Blackout...lights up on Arthur sorting the morning post two weeks later)

ARTHUR

CREDITORS
CREDITORS
SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITORS
OF SEVERAL LONDON PAPERS
IN COMPLAINT
THIRTY DAYS
OVERDUE
INVOICES THAT CAN TALK TO YOU
FOR EVERYTHING FROM BOTTLE CORKS TO PAINT

(Anna enters and dusts.)

THE MORNING POST
YOU MIGHT SAY
IS NOT MY FAV'RITE PART OF ANY DAY

Bristol bottle corks. I'm not paying them. Oh, here's a letter for you.

ANNA

For me, sir?

ARTHUR

From London. And it doesn't look like a bill.

(He goes back to the mail muttering.)

CREDITORS CREDITORS...

(He exits reading the mail leaving Anna with the letter. She is amazed and excited and the underscoring reflects it. She runs to Mrs. Harnham's room knocks enters and waves the letter in Edith's face.)

EDITH

You can leave my post on the desk, Anna.

(Anna waves it in her face some more.)

I am not in need of fanning Anna.

ANNA

It's a letter, Mum.

EDITH

I can see that, Anna.

ANNA

Addressed to me.

EDITH

Really. How nice.

(She goes back to her reading.)

ANNA

But I don't know what to do with it.

EDITH

Open it.

ANNA

(what a great idea! She does)

Now what?

EDITH

Reading might be in order, Anna.

ANNA

Oh mum, you know I can't.

EDITH

Oh, Anna, you can read it. You've been doing very well.

ANNA

But that's in my copy book, Mum. This is fancy gentlemen writing. All the squiggles. Imagine: a letter! But what good's a letter if I can't read a word of it?

(A brilliant idea!)

I know, would you read it to me?

EDITH

Me? Oh, Anna. Do you really want me to know what is in the letter?

ANNA

No. I don't. But if you don't read it for me, I'll never know. You could read it and not listen.

EDITH

A very difficult task. I don't see why you couldn't ask Sarah to read it for you. Or cook.

ANNA

They would laugh at me and I surely don't need them knowing my love life.

EDITH

Do you HAVE a love life?

ANNA

I won't know until you read the letter.

EDITH

Oh, very well.

ANNA

It is from Charles, isn't it?

EDITH

Yes, it seems to be. Shall I?

ANNA

Oh, please, Mum.

EDITH

Dearest Anna...

(There is a burst of music and Charles appears in London singing the letter.)

CHARLES

I'M HERE IN LONDON
ALONE AND WOND'RING IF YOU REALLY CARE
THE LIGHTS OF LONDON
COULD NEVER SHINE AS BRIGHTLY
AS THE MEMORIES WE SHARE

I don't know why you haven't written me, but if that day we spent after the fair means to you what it means to me, you will.

(Charles fades away as Anna begins to cry.)

EDITH

Anna, there is more.

ANNA

(totally recovered and listening intently.)

Oh.

CHARLES

(reappearing to speak the rest of the letter)

Although my profession will only allow me to visit Melchester two or three times a year, I hope that these words will keep our ties firmly bound. One hundred miles is indeed far, but a line from you would bring us closer than a kiss.

ANNA

What does he mean?

CHARLES

What I mean is...please send a tender reply so that when we do see each other in the flesh, it will only seem a day since that day after the fair.

ANNA

(Beginning to cry again.)

Oh, Mum!

(Quickly recovering)

Is that all?

CHARLES

Fondly, Charles...

EDITH

Yes, Anna that is all.

(Charles disappears)

ANNA

(really bawling now.)

Oh it is beautiful.

EDITH

You mustn't cry. It's only a letter. Are you crying because you're happy?

ANNA

(through her tears)

No. I'm crying because I can't write him back.

EDITH

Oh, Anna.

ANNA

And he'll think I don't love him and I'll never see him again and I'll become an old maid or be forced to marry an old man like you did.

EDITH

(hurt)

Anna!

ANNA

Oh, I'm sorry, Mum. But if I don't write him back, he'll think I don't care enough. And that would be a lie.

EDITH

You do care?

ANNA

Oh yes, more than life. You'll do it for me, won't you, dear mistress?

EDITH

Me? Oh, no, Anna!

ANNA

Please, mum.

EDITH

Anna, you are sure that you want me to write the letter for you.

ANNA

Just to put down my words. I couldn't bear him to think I'm not able to do it myself. I should sink into the earth in shame if he knew that.

EDITH

But if I'm to write a letter on your behalf, and I am not saying that I will, I will have to know some important and intimate details... so that he will not think it a fraud.

ANNA

Like what?

EDITH

He says here in the letter something about that day. The day after the fair?

ANNA

Yes?

EDITH

I need to know what you did that day.

ANNA

(The music sneaks in.)

That day?

EDITH

Yes.

ANNA

WELL, WE RODE FOR A WHILE AND THEN...

EDITH

AND THEN?

ANNA

AND THEN? THEN WE WALKED.

EDITH

(disappointed)

Oh. Is that all? You rode and you walked?

ANNA

WELL WE TALKED FOR A BIT AND WE WALKED AGAIN.
WE WALKED UNTIL WE REACHED A FIELD AND THEN...

EDITH

AND THEN?

ANNA

AND THEN...WE...RESTED.

EDITH

You rested?

YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT YOU SAT IN THE FIELD?

ANNA

AT FIRST WE ONLY DID THAT IN THE FIELD AND THEN..

EDITH

AND THEN?

ANNA

(agitated & giggling)

DON'T MAKE ME TELL YOU
I'M BLUSHING PINK ALL OVER

EDITH

THAT'S ALL VERY WELL, YOU
WON'T HAVE A NOTE TO POST

ANNA

DON'T MAKE ME TELL YOU
WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CLOVER

EDITH

THE CLOVER IN THE FIELD?

ANNA

THE FIELD IN WHICH WE RESTED

EDITH

AFTER TALKING AFTER WALKING AFTER RIDING
LET ME ASK YOU ONCE AGAIN
AND THEN?

ANNA

AND THEN?

BOTH

AND THEN? AND THEN?
AND THEN? AND THEN?

EDITH

(Stopping the song.)

Anna, I cannot play this game all day. I will have no time left for tea. I must know if I'm to write this letter for you, did he...touch you?

ANNA

Oh Mistress!

EDITH

Did he?

ANNA

I couldn't defy nature.

EDITH

I see. Anna, where did he touch you?

ANNA

(in all innocence)

In the field.

EDITH

Anna...

ANNA

And I do love him so. And he loves me. He told me so then.

EDITH

Oh Anna, they all tell you that then. I blame myself.

ANNA

But why, Mum? You wasn't there.

EDITH

I feel responsible for you all the same. I shouldn't have let you go.

ANNA

But I'm grateful to you.

(confidentially)

And Mum, I liked it. A lot.

EDITH

(interested.)

Did you?

ANNA

Don't you?

EDITH

(with weariness.)

Oh, Anna, I'm a married woman. *(She makes the decision)* Well, let us get on to the letter.

ANNA

Then you'll do it?

EDITH

Yes, I will.

ANNA

Oh, thank you, Thank you.

(Edith begins to write.)

ANNA

(Running on. Over Edith's shoulder)

Tell him I love him madly and want him to return. Ask him when he's coming to see me again. Tell him he's my one true love and that I love him more than life itself.

EDITH

Anna, the whole letter will say that. Now, should it be..."Dearest Charles? Darling Charles? Or just Dear Charles?"

ANNA

I don't like any of them. How about greatest love of my life?

EDITH

(ignoring her.)

Beloved? That's it. Simple, direct, passionate.

ANNA

I don't like it.

EDITH

He will. Now, would you like to hear what you are going to write?

(Anna nods and Edith reads the letter as she writes it.)

BELOVED,
WHAT RAPTURE
TO READ WHAT YOU SAY.
THOUGH WORDS CAN-
NOT CAPTURE WHAT I FEEL TODAY.
THE MOMENT WE SHARED
WAS EXQUISITE AND SUBLIME
A MOMENT IN SPACE, A MOMENT IN TIME.
YOU ASK ME
TO SEND YOU
A TENDER REPLY.
LET MY WORDS

EDITH

BEFRIEND YOU AND PLEASE KNOW THAT I
AM LONGING
AND WAITING,
FOR WORDS FROM YOUR PEN.
PLEASE WRITE ME WHEN
WE CAN SHARE A MOMENT AGAIN
AND REMEMBER TILL THEN
I'M
YOUR ANNA

ANNA

(truly thrilled, she hugs Edith)

Oh, Mum, thank you. It's beautiful. Where did you find the words? Oh please read it again.

EDITH

Again?

ANNA

It's everything I feel. But I could never put it down like that. Please read it again.

EDITH

Alright.

BELOVED...

*(The lights go down on Edith and up on Charles in London. An excited vamp begins.
Bookshelves line the small space. He is reading the letter with amazement.)*

CHARLES

BELOVED?
AMAZING!
WHERE DID SHE FIND THE WORDS?

My dear friend William, You will remember I wrote you of my last jaunt on the western circuit. Amongst the many girls I met, there has turned out to be one odd duck. A little yellow haired maid named Anna.
Anna?

A SIMPLE COUNTRY GIRL,
LACKING POMP AND COMPLICATION
QUITE THE VERY TYPE I FAVOR
FAR BENEATH MY STATION
SHE WAS JUST A SUMMER FANCY
I THOUGHT I'D HAVE A WHIRL
IF MY SCHEDULE COULD WORK IT
ON THE ODD OCCASION WHEN I'M
ON THE WESTERN CIRCUIT.

CHARLES

A KIND OF IMPROMPTU DANCE
CALLED A SUMMER FANCY
THEN THIS LETTER ARRIVES
AND DISPELS ALL MY PRECONCEIVED NOTIONS.
I'M FEELING HAPPY AND HOPEFUL
AND JUST
A BIT SCARED.
WITH ALL MY CARELESS AFFAIRS
I HAVE NEVER MUCH CARED
BEFORE.

As I've always done with the others, I gave the girl only two thirds of my name: Charles Bradford, leaving off my family name of Raye. This practice has always made me feel safer. Oddly enough, this time, I feel guilty.

I GET LETTERS GALORE
AND FROM WOMEN WHO CALL THEMSELVES LADIES.
BUT THEY ALL PLAY OUT THEIR HANDS IN
THE OBVIOUS WAYS.
SHE KNOWS A PLAY IS MORE POTENT WHEN ONE UNDERPLAYS.
GOOD SHOW!
THE MOMENT I'M PREPARED
TO DISMISS HER AND FORGET HER
WHAT I THOUGHT MIGHT BE A SCRIBBLE
TURNS INTO A LETTER
RESTRAINT MAY SOON BE ESSENTIAL
THIS CONQUEST MAY PROVE CONSEQUENTIAL
I'VE ALWAYS KNOWN AT A GLANCE
HOW TO PICK OUT A LASS.
BUT THIS ONE SUMMER FANCY REFUSES TO PASS.
THERE'S NOTHING I CAN SAY OR DO
THIS SUMMER FANCY MAY LAST
THE WHOLE WINTER THRU.

(Signing the letter to William)

Your devoted friend, Charles Bradford Raye

(softening at Anna's letter)

BELOVED?
AMAZING
WHERE DID SHE FIND THE WORDS?

(Blackout on Charles and up on the front door. Mr. Harnham is going through the mail on another day. Anna and Edith are present.)

ARTHUR

CREDITORS, CREDITORS
SEND LETTERS TO THE EDITORS...

Another letter for you, Anna. From London. Again.

ANNA

Thank you, sir.

(He hands it to her. Anna makes a point of showing it to Edith and putting in her apron. There is an air of conspiracy. Arthur begins to exit.)

EDITH

(for Arthur's ears.)

Anna, please come up and do my room after my nap.

ANNA

(thrilled.)

Yes, Mrs. Harnham.

(Edith exits.)

ANNA

SOMEHOW EVERYTHING IS NEW
A DOOR IS OP'NIN' UP AND I AM GOING THROUGH
SOMEWHERE VERY DEEP INSIDE
ARE FEELINGS THAT I NEVER EVEN THOUGHT TO HIDE

(The music continues as we see Edith in her room waiting for Anna and the letter.)

EDITH

ANOTHER LETTER...
ANOTHER CHANCE TO EXPRESS
MY INNERMOST THOUGHTS
ANOTHER LETTER
ANOTHER HOUR OF LETTING MY FANCY GO
HOW ODD THAT I RELISH IT SO

(She begins reading a book and we hear a knock at her door.)

EDITH

Come in, Anna.

ANNA

ANOTHER LETTER

EDITH

I'm reading now, Anna.

ANNA

ANOTHER DAY WILL ARRIVE
AND THEN YOU CAN READ
BUT IT'S A LETTER
AND IF WE DON'T WRITE HIM NOW
THERE'S A CHANCE HE MIGHT
THINK I DON'T LOVE HIM
SO WE MUST POST A LETTER TONIGHT

EDITH

OH ANNA, HOW SILLY. ALL RIGHT.

(Edith reads the letter to herself and begins to write.)

EDITH

Let's see...

BELOVED...

(The light changes and Edith is thinking to herself as she writes the letter.)

WHY DO I FEEL SO JUMPY AND NERVOUS?
WHY DOES THE PEN TREMBLE IN MY HAND?
WHY THIS INTENSE ANTICIPATION
THE MORE I WRITE THE LESS I UNDERSTAND

(The light changes back and she has finished writing now. Charles appears in his rooms reading the letter.)

CHARLES & EDITH

...AND REMEMBER TILL THEN
I'M YOUR ANNA

CHARLES

My Dear friend William, You have always been such a patient friend in reading of my exploits. I enclose a second letter from the one called Anna. If I am not careful, this one might make me care, for she has instinctively found my Achilles heel. And that is a dangerous thing.

(Against his better judgment, He takes another piece of paper and begins to write)

DEAREST ANNA...

(Anna runs in with another letter Edith is wearing her hair down with a ribbon in it.)

ANNA

ANOTHER LETTER

EDITH

(Edith begins reading the letter to Anna with her own relish.)

Dearest Anna, what a joy to hear from you again. The words that you have put to paper somehow...

ANNA

(overlapping.)

SOMEHOW EVERYTHING IS NEW
A DOOR IS OPEN WIDE
AND I AM RUNNING THROUGH

EDITH

'Fondly Charles'. Well, what shall we say today?

ANNA

Tell him that he's...

EDITH

I know. How about this?

BELOVED
EVERY MORNING I RUN
JUST TO GREET YOU...

(Charles joins her as he reads the letter.)

EDITH & CHARLES

I READ YOU IN A FLASH

CHARLES

AND WHEN I NEED TO
I RE-READ YOU

ANNA

Oh, Mistress, how do you do it? It's like it's from your own heart?

EDITH

Oh?

(The light finds Arthur, Edith enters with an envelope in her hand. She quickly conceals it from Arthur.)

ARTHUR

I was thinking, Edith, that you might walk with me to the cellars this afternoon.

EDITH

This afternoon? Oh, no Arthur, I shall be too busy this afternoon.

ARTHUR

Well, perhaps another time.

EDITH

Perhaps.

(Edith quickly leaves a baffled and hurt Arthur.)

(The light fades on him and finds Charles)

CHARLES

My dear William, Anna is somehow unlike the other girls. Their notes reveal them for what they are. Easy conquests. But Anna's...I find myself reading them again and again. And yearning for something more than just my arms around her.

I AM CONFUSED BY THIS GIRL
WHO HAS SUDDENLY TURNED TO A WOMAN
BUT AS THE AUTUMN ARRIVES I'M APPALLED AND AGHAST
THIS SUMMER FANCY MAY LINGER WHEN WINTER HAS PAST

(Arthur is seen handing Anna another letter. He leaves.)

ANNA

(running into Edith's room with another letter.)

ANOTHER LETTER...

(Edith looks younger than she has in years. Her dress is youthful and her face seems unlined.)

ANNA

You look beautiful, Mum. You seem to be getting younger.

EDITH

ANOTHER LETTER
AND HOW AMAZING TO SEE WITH EACH PASSING DAY
HIS WORDS MAKE THE YEARS MELT AWAY

ANNA

SOMEHOW EVERYTHING IS NEW
A DOOR HAS OPENED UP...

EDITH

(overlapping.)

A DOOR HAS OPENED UP AND I AM GOING THROUGH

BOTH

(unaware of each other.)

SOMEWHERE JUST BEHIND THE DOOR

BOTH

ARE FEELINGS THAT I'VE NEVER EVEN FELT BEFORE

EDITH

(begins to write)

BELOVED...

(lights move from her to Charles.)

CHARLES

(overlapping.)

ANOTHER LETTER
ANOTHER CHANCE TO EXPRESS MY INNERMOST THOUGHTS
ANOTHER LETTER
ANOTHER ANSWER TO WRITE AND WHEN I AM THROUGH

ALL THREE

SOMEHOW EVERYTHING IS NEW

EDITH

ANOTHER LETTER

ALL

ANOTHER LETTER

CHARLES

EVERY MORNING I RUN

EDITH

EVERY MORNING I RUN

ANNA

EVERY MORNING I RUN

EDITH & CHARLES

JUST TO GREET YOU

(the lights dim to pin-spots on each of their faces as they reveal their inner thoughts about the letter.)

EDITH

(as the vamp begins)

Beloved...

CHARLES

(overlapping)

Beloved...

ANNA

(overlapping)

Beloved...

ALL

WHO WOULD DREAM THAT MY LIFE WOULD START,
THAT A PEN AND PAPER COULD WARM MY HEART,
THAT THE MORNING POST COULD HAVE SUCH PULL,
THAT MY EMPTY LIFE COULD BE SO FULL?
I WILL ASK FOR NOTHING BETTER
JUST LET THERE ALWAYS BE
ANOTHER LETTER.

(The lights dim on the trio as Arthur's vamp start. A light hits Arthur, holding a bottle of wine and a glass. He refers to Edith.)

ARTHUR

PRETTIER... YOUNGER...
IT IS OBVIOUS TO SEE
A DOOR IS OPENING UP
BUT NOT TO ME
NOT TO ME
NOT ME...

(By this time the light finds Anna and Edith giggling over a letter.)

ANNA

Oh, it is so beautiful.

EDITH

Yes, it is, isn't it?

(they laugh until they realize Arthur has entered the room. There is suddenly silence and Anna curtsies and exits leaving Edith holding the letter and the bag)

ARTHUR

What's this?

EDITH

This? Oh, just one of the letters that I am helping Anna to write to her beau. You must have noticed that we have been occupied of late.

ARTHUR

No, I haven't... Yes I have.

(She is still holding the letter out.)

May I?

EDITH

Of course.

(Arthur takes the letter as Edith rings the servant bell and the lights change. He sniffs the envelope, rises and remembers. Edith goes on with the scene just as if her were still there. Just like the earlier dinner scene but in reverse.)

ARTHUR

Beloved?

BELOVED, THE LETTERS, YOUR LETTERS...

EDITH

Mostly I help her with her grammar and spelling. And I throw in a few ideas...

ARTHUR

I REMEMBER SUNLIT MORNINGS
LONG BEFORE I FELL ASLEEP
AND I'M WAITING IN A GARDEN
FOR THE LETTERS THAT I SWORE
I'D ALWAYS KEEP
BUT THEY'RE GONE

EDITH

I've even helped her with an opening salutation...

ARTHUR

NOTHING STAYS

EDITH

Something quite romantic...

ARTHUR

ALL THAT'S LEFT IS THE PHRASE:

EDITH & ARTHUR

EVERY MORNING I RUN
JUST TO GREET YOU

ARTHUR

STRANGE HOW A MEMORY THAT WAS SHORT
GROWS LONGER WITH EVERY BOTTLE OF PORT

(The lights change to reality and Edith is in mid-sentence.)

EDITH

...And who knows, maybe someday, if I continue to help, there will be a wedding...

(The lights on her fade as Arthur continues his musing.)

ARTHUR

I REMEMBER OUR COUNTRY WEDDING
WITNESSED BY MY SISTER AND SOME COWS
AND THE MELCHESTER MINISTER,
ADMINISTERED THE VOWS

EDITH

(As she rises to leave the table.)

...of course that could be years away...

ARTHUR

IT'S BEEN YEARS SINCE I'VE THOUGHT OF THAT DAY
OR THE ONE WHEN YOU TURNED TO SAY:

EDITH

Arthur, a baby is on its way.

ARTHUR

(straight out to his memory of her.)

AND THE NURSERY IS WAITING
AND THE ROCKING HORSE IS CARVED
AND THE CRADLE'S BY THE WINDOW
THAT LOOKS OUT INTO THE GARDEN AS IT THRIVES
AND HOW SWIFTLY JOY WAS DONE
HAVE A DRINK AND BURY YOUR SON

The doctor says there is no reason why you couldn't have another child. If you want to.

EDITH

(in his memory)

I just need some more time, Arthur...just a little time...

ARTHUR

YEARS GO BY
NOTHING STAYS
ALL THAT'S LEFT IS THE PHRASE
EVERY MORNING I RUN
JUST TO GREET YOU

(Arthur' begins to understand the implications of the letter. Sniffing the letter again, he realizes that Edith might be in this more deeply than she lets on. Anna enters with a tray for tea, suddenly faints and falls to the floor as Arthur yells for Edith)

Edith! Edith! Damn!

(The light goes out on Arthur and the girl and quickly comes up Edith's room.)

ANNA

Quite a switch, you taking care of me. It's kinda of nice.

EDITH

Well, don't get used to it.

ANNA

I may have to. For a while anyway.

EDITH

Why? What do you mean?

ANNA

I mean I may be fainting some more.

EDITH

No, Anna, you will not. I won't hear of it.

ANNA

(taking the plunge)

I'm going to have a baby!

EDITH

But that's ridiculous!

ANNA

Cook knew the minute she saw me. She said anyone with eyes would.

EDITH

But how can it be?

ANNA

Charles will come for me. He'll have to do the right thing. That's what Cook says.

EDITH

Are you sure it's Charles?

ANNA

Of course, Mum. He was the first. And the only.

EDITH

Really?

ANNA

Yes.

EDITH

Oh, poor Charles.

ANNA

Poor Charles? What about me? I'm the one who's going to blow up like a plum pudding. I'm the one who's going to have to take care of it. Me. But if this means that I will be with Charles forever, then it's a good thing.

EDITH

But what makes you think he'll even take you in this condition?

ANNA

He has to! And he loves me. He'll do the right think. He must.

EDITH

Must? There are no laws that say he must, Anna.

ANNA

There's the law of love, ain't there?

EDITH

Are you mad?

ANNA

You have to write him now, Mum. You have to tell him my condition and to come for me.

EDITH

Do you think it will be an easy letter for me to write? Do you think it will do us any good? This is not just something I can dash off, Anna. A letter such as this one requires skill and care.

ANNA

Tell him I need him. Write him that now more than ever I can't live without him.

EDITH

No, Anna. I am afraid that I don't have a suitable Anna-note for this situation.

ANNA

Then it will over, Mum. For you and me and the baby.

(There is a knock on the door)

EDITH

Who is it?

ARTHUR

It's your husband.

EDITH

Oh, Arthur, one moment. That will be all, Anna.

(Anna looks at her pleadingly, then curtsies and opens the door. Arthur enters.)

ANNA

(As she exits)

Please...

(There is an undercurrent of hysteria throughout.)

ARTHUR

I hope I'm not disturbing you, Edith.

EDITH

No, Arthur. And I'm fine.

ARTHUR

I have no doubt. But how is SHE? Anna, I mean.

EDITH

Who? Oh, fine. Just a touch of the grippe, I think.

ARTHUR

I see. I was a bit concerned. With her fainting and all. We can't very well have maids lying all over the dining room floor.

EDITH

Yes. Well, I am sure that she appreciates your concern.

(Edith begins to weep a bit and though she tries to hide it Arthur sees.)

ARTHUR

What is the matter, dear?

EDITH

Nothing.

ARTHUR

As you say. *(Looking around her room)* I had forgotten how nice this room is. It is rare that I visit it...

EDITH

Arthur, do you know what day today is?

ARTHUR

No.

EDITH

Today is the anniversary of our son's birth.

ARTHUR

Oh. Mrs. Harnham, please...

EDITH

(going on)

Don't you ever wonder what he would have been like, Arthur?

ARTHUR

(surprising even himself.)

Of course I do. But that was fourteen years ago and we have learned how to go on.

EDITH

(laughing at the thought of it)

Have we?

ARTHUR

Edith, Some things are better left unspoken. You are not yourself.

EDITH

How right you are, Arthur. I am not myself.

ARTHUR

Why don't you rest, dear.

EDITH

The only question is if I'm not myself, then who am I?

(The music begins)

ARTHUR

I'll have Polly check on you in an hour or so.

EDITH

(The lights dim on Arthur and come up on Anna upstairs in bed.)

WHO AM I?
WHO IS SHE?
THE LETTERS CONCUR THEY BOTH ARE ME
BUT THE WOMAN IN THE NOTES
WITH HER HEART THAT BEATS ANEW
DOES NOT KNOW WHAT TO DO
IF I REFUSE TO WRITE TO HIM
AS SHE INTENDED
THEN NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME
BUT IF I CHOOSE THE PEN
THEN IT IS ALL BUT ENDED
AND NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME
HOW POETIC WHEN JUSTICE OCCURS.
THE CHILD IS EXPECTING HER OWN.

BUT IT CAN'T BE DENIED
HER FATE IS DECIDED
BY NOTES I SIGN.
STILL THE BABY WILL ALWAYS BE HERS
WHILE I AND THE NOTES ARE ALONE.
HER REWARD FOR OUR LIES:

EDITH

AN INFANT THAT CRIES.
IT'LL WET!
IT'LL WHINE!
AND I WISH IT WERE MINE!

(The music comes to a momentary stop as Edith composes herself and with determination goes to her desk and begins compose a letter.)

Beloved, every morning I run just to greet you. Today I must write with news...news of a miracle. Our day together, after the fair, has brought about a wonderful miracle, but one that must be dealt with lovingly. I am going to have...

(She covers her mouth as the light finds Charles reading the letter.)

CHARLES

...a baby!

EDITH

A baby.

ANNA

A baby.

CHARLES

(As the music continues Edith holds the baby letter and Charles finishes reading the same letter. He takes out a piece of paper and dips his pen and writes a reply.)

How extraordinary. Dear Mr. Harnham....

(The light finds Arthur as he receives the letter. He looks over at Edith as the light finds Anna in her little bed. Now all are in their pools of light, in their separate times and places.)

ANNA

IS THIS THE END?
NO IT AIN'T. NOT TODAY.

CHARLES

(trying to convince himself)

NOTHING AT ALL NOW TO FEAR

ARTHUR

BELOVED OR FRIEND,
THIS COULD GO EITHER WAY

EDITH

THE ONLY THING CLEAR
IS THE MOTH IS TOO NEAR
THE FLAME

ALL

AND NOTHING WILL EVER BE

ARTHUR

I got the most amusing letter, dear.

ALL

(They all come down-stage and together for a final tableau)

THE SAME

Curtain Act I.

ACT II

(As the entr'acte ends, the curtain rises on the same tableau that ended Act I.)

CHARLES

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE...

ANNA

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE...

EDITH

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE...

(Arthur speaks to Edith)

ARTHUR

I got the most amusing letter, dear.

ANNA & CHARLES
(as they exit)

THERE COMES A MOMENT

(The lights become normal as Arthur continues)

EDITH

(Disinterested)

Really.

ARTHUR

Don't you want to know from whom it is?

EDITH

Yes.

ARTHUR

It's from Anna's beau. He wants to meet with me to discuss her future. Imagine that.

(He peers over the letter at Edith.)

The fool is going to be at the Tea Shoppe at the Railway station this afternoon at four fifteen. He says he will be between trains and has one hour to discuss the lot.

EDITH
(With a frozen smile)

Really?

HOW NICE
THE PLACE TO BE
A CHAT
A SPOT OF TEA
HOW NICE
THE RAILWAY VIEW
HOW NICE...FOR YOU

Anything else in the content?

ARTHUR

No, it's rather mysterious. And I hate mysteries. So we shall leave this one unsolved.

EDITH

You mean you are not going?

(He begins to leave with the letter and then turns and hands it to Edith.)

ARTHUR

No.

YOU HANDLE IT, EDITH

EDITH

BUT WHY?

ARTHUR

YES, YOU CAN HANDLE IT, EDITH
YOU ARE UP TO THE TASK AND...

EDITH

I? YOU REALLY THINK SO?

ARTHUR

YES, YOU KNOW THE GIRL SO MUCH BETTER THAN I

EDITH

I DO.

ARTHUR

SO TAKE AN HOUR FOR TEA
AND REPORT TO ME
WHEN YOU'RE THROUGH
TRUE?

EDITH

MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT
THE TEA SHOP AT FOUR FIFTEEN,
YOU SAY?

ARTHUR

PRECISELY, DEAR

EDITH

BUT IS IT POLITE
MAY A WOMAN BE GO-BETWEEN?

ARTHUR

SHE MAY

EDITH

WELL, THE GIRLS IN MY CARE
SO THE LIAISON SHOULD BE ME

ARTHUR

Good.

IT'S ALL OVER BUT THE SHOUTING

EDITH

ONE CAN ALWAYS USE THE OUTING

BOTH

AND OF COURSE...A SPOT OF TEA

EDITH

AND THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING SOOTHING
IN THAT AFTERNOON PICK-ME-UP

ARTHUR

AND WHEN YOU'RE THROUGH
YOU CAN READ YOUR FUTURE
IN THE LEAVES THAT ARE LEFT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE CUP

EDITH

Why Arthur, I never thought of you as having a mystical side.

ARTHUR

There is more to each of us than meets the eye, Mrs. Harnham.

(He gives her the letter and begins to leave.)

EDITH

But Arthur, I don't know what I shall say to him?

ARTHUR

JUST SEE WHAT HE WANTS, DEAR

EDITH

THIS PLAN...

ARTHUR

Yes?

EDITH

PERHAPS IS BETTER FOR ALL
IF YOU HANDLE IT MAN TO MAN

ARTHUR

COULD BE YOU'RE RIGHT, DEAR

EDITH

What?

ARTHUR

A MAN TO MAN TALK WITH HER ARDENT AND EAGER BEAU

EDITH

Oh.

ARTHUR

AND I MAY LEARN SUCH A LOT FROM THE LAD
YES, I THINK I'LL GO

(As he starts to leave with the letter, she gets an idea.)

NO.
ON THE WAY HOME
I COULD PURGE MYSELF OF SIN

ARTHUR

Sin?

EDITH

AT CHURCH

ARTHUR

OF COURSE AT CHURCH

EDITH

AND ONE MUST BE SURE
THAT POOR ANNA IS NOT LEFT IN...

ARTHUR

THE LURCH?

EDITH

YES. SO I'LL MEET HIM AT THE STATION
FOR AN BIT OF CONVERSATION
BUT AS ANYONE CAN SEE
MY PRIMARY GOAL IN DOING THE CHORE

EDITH

IS THE SCONE...

ARTHUR

AND THE JAM

EDITH

AND THE BREAD

BOTH

NOTHING MORE THAN A NICE HOT SPOT...
YOU CAN CHAT OF THIS AND THAT
AND NEVER BE AT SEA
AS LONG AS YOU HAVE GOT
A NICE HOT SPOT OF...

(They begin to walk in opposite directions and turn back in time for:)

TEA.

(The lights blackout on Edith, but Arthur remains, as a light finds Charles at the Tea Shoppe at the train station in Melchester. He is seated at the table.)

ARTHUR

A SPOT OF TEA
IS ALL IT IS
BUT THIS LITTLE LIAISON IS BOUND TO TELL US
JUST WHAT IS MINE
AND WHAT IS HIS
SO IT'S TOTALLY UNFOUNDED
IF I FIND THAT I AM JEALOUS
JEALOUS?
IMAGINE THAT!
BUT IF IT'S TRUE
IS A LITTLE KNOWLEDGE WORSE THAN REALLY KNOWING?
YOU SENT HER OFF
SO YOU GO TOO
AND AT LEAST THEN IF YOU GO
PERHAPS YOU'LL KNOW
JUST WHERE YOU'RE GOING

ARTHUR

Anna! Get me my coat, please? And hurry!

ARTHUR

(as she enters with them)

You need not prepare tea for me. I shall be very busy. An interesting vintage is arriving today and I shall be looking it over very carefully.

(The music becomes train-like as Edith enters the tea shoppe. She stands before him. He is expecting a man.)

EDITH

Mr. Bradford? I am Edith Harnham. My husband was unable to meet you, so I am here in his place.

(Charles immediately rises at the beginning of the line. He is clearly surprised and not displeased. Edith looks very attractive. There is an immediate reaction to their chemistry.)

CHARLES

Forgive me for staring, but have we met before?

EDITH

(flustered.)

I don't think so. I'm seldom away from Melchester.

CHARLES

No matter. Oh please, excuse my manners, do sit down.

EDITH

(He pulls out a chair for Edith and she sits. He sits and pours out some tea.)

This is a lovely Tea Shoppe. Usually the ones at the train stations aren't. I know, I travel a lot. But this is. Lovely.

(Edith is becoming a bit embarrassed at his attention.)

I very rarely take tea in public places, but this is...very nice.

(He hands her her tea.)

Thank you. One lump and milk please.

CHARLES

At your service. Anna has written about you. I feel that I know you already.

EDITH

And that is whom we're here to discuss. Anna.

CHARLES

Yes, we are.

(Very quietly and unnoticed, Arthur enters. Arthur sits at a table with his back to Edith and Charles and listens.)

EDITH

Your note to my husband was a trifle cryptic. You only said that you wanted to meet and discuss Anna's future. What did you mean, her future?

CHARLES

Don't you know, Mrs. Harnham?

EDITH

Know what?

CHARLES

This is why it might have been better to discuss this with another man. It might be too delicate for a woman's ears.

EDITH

I am not made of glass, Mr. Bradford. And I know that Anna is going to have a child.

CHARLES

That is a relief.

EDITH

For everyone but Anna. My husband, on the other hand, does not know. If he did, Anna might not be employed for very long.

CHARLES

I see.

EDITH

Or was that the purpose of this meeting? To inform my husband of her condition.

CHARLES

Not in the way you're thinking, Mrs. Harnham. I know my responsibility and I will provide for Anna and the child.

EDITH

Provide? For their care?

CHARLES

That is my first duty. And that was my first inclination.

EDITH

Does that entail...marriage?

CHARLES

I had hoped it wouldn't.

EDITH

Really Mr. Bradford.

CHARLES

Raye.

EDITH

I beg your pardon.

CHARLES

My name is Charles Bradford Raye.

EDITH

But the letters were posted by Mr. Bradford.

CHARLES

Permit me to explain.

EDITH

Please do.

CHARLES

Mrs. Harnham, I feel such a cad. But I also feel such compatibility to you. It seems so easy to talk between us that I must make a confession. First off, I have never told Anna my profession. I am a Barrister.

EDITH

But why have you not told her?

CHARLES

To be truthful, not knowing who she really was, inside I mean, I didn't want the girl knowing who I was or even where I lived. Hence the postal box. And hence the name change.

EDITH

I suppose that I do understand, Mr.... Raye. You have ambitions. A young man like you must want to rise up in his profession.

CHARLES

How perceptive you are, Mrs. Harnham. Just recently I was invited to change chambers. Which means that I will no longer be going on the western circuit. And that I will remain in London.

EDITH

I see.

CHARLES

This means settling down. A proper man with a proper wife.

EDITH

Anna?

CHARLES

At first I thought that she could never be a suitable wife. But as each new letter arrived...

EDITH

Oh dear, surely you know that they are just words and paper. The letters are not the woman.

CHARLES

Those were exactly my feelings until today. On the train, I re-read all the letters. And I looked into Anna's soul and saw...everything.

MOST PEOPLE CAN READ
BUT MOST PEOPLE SEE WORDS
A PAGE FULL OF SYMBOLS AND SIGNS
BUT I'VE FOUND ALL THAT I NEED
BY LEARNING TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES

(He gets up and stands behind Edith. She looks up at him.)

EACH PHRASE THAT SHE WRITES
REVEALS PART OF HER SOUL
EACH SENTENCE MORE CLEARLY COMBINES
CHARLES

THE GIRL THAT SHE USED TO BE
WITH THE WOMAN I SEE BETWEEN THE LINES

THAT RAREST OF CREATURES:
A WOMAN OF IMAGINATION
UNSCHOOLED? SHE WELL MAY BE
THOSE CHARMS THAT ATTRACTED ME
HAD DISTRACTED ME FROM HER STATION
BUT ONE LOOK WITHIN HAS MADE ME SEE

ALTHOUGH SHE MAY BE YOUNG
HER WORDS SEEMS TO BE WISE
AND ALL OF MY BEING STILL PINES
FOR SOMEONE I'VE ONLY ONCE SEEN
BUT SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN WHERE I'VE BEEN
AND TAUGHT ME TO READ BETWEEN THE LINES

When I first met Anna, I wanted her to be summer fancy. But relationships rule themselves. And after rereading the treasures that I keep tied in a ribbon...

EDITH

You keep them tied in a ribbon?

CHARLES

Yes. I do. And this last letter that I have received has moved and changed somehow. It is so sensitive and caring. No demands, no recriminations.... I'm afraid I have fallen hopelessly in love with the woman tucked neatly away in those envelopes.

EDITH

Oh dear...

(Arthur, having heard enough, quietly exits)

CHARLES

Let me show you, Mrs. Harnham. Read the letter, please.

EDITH

Oh no, Mr. Raye. I will take your word for it.

CHARLES

Please, Mrs. Harnham.

EDITH

It is certainly much too personal for me to read.

CHARLES

It IS personal. And wonderful

EDITH

Wonderful?

CHARLES

Full of innate taste.

EDITH

Really?

CHARLES

If you would only read it for yourself you would know.

EDITH

No I couldn't. Really I couldn't.

CHARLES

Please.

EDITH

Well, if it's a short one.

(As the music comes back, she takes the letter and looks at it.)

CHARLES

SEE THE FLAIR IN HER HAND

EDITH

You were right, Mr. Raye. She is sensitive...

CHARLES

THAT'S NOT EASY TO FIND

EDITH

...and very caring.. The girl does have a way with words.

CHARLES

DO YOU FEEL THAT WAY TOO?

EDITH

This letter is very sympathetic and dear. And it clear that she loves you very much...

CHARLES

YOU HAVE MADE UP MY MIND

EDITH

(As the music dies down)

What do you mean?

CHARLES

When you first sat down at the table, I was still unsure. But if you can also see, in just a short glance at the letter, those special qualities, then I shouldn't hesitate for a moment. I will write and tell her that I cannot live without her.

EDITH
(forlorn)

And I helped you decide that?

CHARLES

(He pulls out a piece of stationery and begins writing that very moment.)

Yes. Isn't it wonderful?

THAT RAREST OF CREATURES

EDITH

HE LOVES ME

CHARLES

A WOMAN OF IMAGINATION

EDITH

AN IMAGINARY WOMAN

CHARLES

UNSCHOOLED?

EDITH

WE FOOLED HIM

CHARLES

SHE WELL MAY BE

EDITH

OR DID HE FOOL ME?

CHARLES

THOSE CHARMS THAT ATTRACTED ME
HAD DISTRACTED ME FROM HER STATION

EDITH

EVEN HER STATIONERY'S MINE

CHARLES

BUT ONE LOOK WITHIN HAS MADE ME SEE

Here is my proposal. Will you be so good as to deliver it? I think it will make her happy.

(She takes it and he notices the tears welling in Edith's eyes.)

Oh, Mrs. Harnham. You must be the most sympathetic woman in the world. You have tears in your eyes. Tears for me and my pretty young girl.

EDITH

(regaining her control)

Yes. That she is. Pretty...

CHARLES

And young!

EDITH

Mustn't forget young. Well, I must be getting home and back to my rocking chair and knitting needles.

(Charles doesn't hear this. He is lost in reverie.)

CHARLES

SOMEONE I'VE ONLY ONCE SEEN

EDITH

I SEE...

CHARLES

IS SOMEONE WHO KNOWS WHAT I MEAN

EDITH

IT'S ME. IT'S ME

CHARLES

AND TAUGHT ME TO READ

BOTH

BETWEEN THE LINES

CHARLES

Thank you helping me to decide. Good day, Mrs. Harnham.

(He goes.)

EDITH

Good-bye, Beloved.

(As the light dims on Edith we find Arthur in Edith's room. He opens her drawer and finds the beribboned letters, takes one out and starts to read it as Anna enters the room Arthur sees her.)

ARTHUR

Anna....

ANNA

(startled)

Oh, Sir! I didn't know you were here in Mrs. Harnham's room.

ARTHUR

Ah, Anna, just the person that I've been wanting to see.

ANNA

Really? But I was just going to...dust. You know how it piles up. What did you...*(notices the letters)*
Are those my letters?

ARTHUR

They appear to be. I found them in the mistress' drawer. She must be holding them for safe keeping.

ANNA

Oh...yes. May I see them?

ARTHUR

Of course. After all they are addressed to you.

(He hands her a letter and opens one himself. They both look at the letters. Anna of course can't read hers)

This man must love you very much. And do you love him in return, Anna?

ANNA

Oh, sir, I do. With all of my heart.

ARTHUR

And you must be very grateful to the mistress for helping you with your grammar and spelling.

ANNA

Oh, she does more than that, sir. Why, she practically writes the letters for me. In fact, if truth be told, I think she writes some when I'm not even telling her what to say. *(catching herself)* And for that I'm truly grateful.

ARTHUR

What does he look like, your young man?

ANNA

Charles? Oh...well...he's tall. And handsome. And he has brown hair. I think.

ARTHUR

You think?

ANNA

Well, you see, sir, it's been a while since I seed him. Since the fair, to be precise. But I do remember that he's tall. And that he's a gentleman.

ARTHUR

I see. And has the mistress met him?

ANNA

Oh no, sir! I don't think so. How could she? Him being in London and her being...oh, no sir.

ARTHUR

Well, Anna, this has been a rare experience, our little chat. We will, of course, keep it between us. Mrs. Harnham need not know of it.

ANNA

Yes, Sir. I don't think we've ever had a talk. If the truth be known, sir, you've never said much of anything to me. So this was kind of nice.

ARTHUR

Yes, Anna. I will leave you to your...dusting.

ANNA

Yes, sir. The dust that never dies. Sir?

ARTHUR

Yes, Anna?

ANNA

(looking at the letters.)

When you love someone and they say that they love you, doesn't that mean that everything will turn out right in the end?

ARTHUR

(amused)

Ah, Anna...of course it does.

ANNA

But sir, if things ain't quite right, should a person do something to...right 'em?

ARTHUR

Sometimes just sitting still and waiting is the most one can do. Good day.

(He exits leaving Anna with the letters.)

ANNA

HOW NICE THAT SHE KEPT ALL MY NOTES IN A RIBBON
HOW LOVELY TO SEE THEM ALL STACKED LIKE A MOUNTAIN
AND IT'S PLAIN FOR ANYONE TO SEE
THAT SHE LOCKED THEM IN HER DESK...FOR ME

MM, MM.

(music, She goes into the desk and finds some more letters.)

IT'S SWEET THAT'S SHE HID THEM AS HER LITTLE SECRET
THEY'RE WRITTEN TO ME, SO THERE'S NAUGHT TO BE SCARED OF
AND IT DOESN'T MATTER, NOT AT ALL
THAT THERE'S MORE OF THEM THAN I RECALL

(counting)

One, two, three, four, five...

PERHAPS SHE IS MORE THAN A FRIEND WHO IS HELPFUL
PERHAPS I AM LESS OF A DOPE THAN A DUPE
PERHAPS IT'S TIME TO JUST RECLAIM
MY LIFE, MY LETTERS AND MY NAME...

(During the last part of the song, Edith enters. Anna turns to see her and is startled.)

Oh, Mum. How long have you been standing there?

EDITH

Just for a moment.

ANNA

Oh. And how was charity matinee, Mrs.?

EDITH

Fine, Anna.

ANNA

What was the play?

EDITH

Cyrano De Bergerac.

ANNA

I'm so restless. When is he going to ask me to marry him?

EDITH

Funny you should ask that question. He has written and he has asked you to be his wife. Well, Anna? What shall we say?

ANNA

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!!!

EDITH

I somehow thought that would be your reply.

ANNA

Oh, Mum, does he say if the wedding is soon?

EDITH

Why do you ask that, Anna?

ANNA

Because I hate people thinking I'm just getting fat.

EDITH

I see. No, he does not say when the wedding shall be.

ANNA

You don't seem happy. Doesn't the thought of Charles marrying me send shivers down your spine?

EDITH

To say the least.

ANNA

Don't you think we should write him back right now?

EDITH

Anna. Sit down. Please.

(Anna hesitates for a moment and then thinks better of it and sits.)

EDITH

What would you say, Anna, if I said you shouldn't marry Charles?

ANNA

What do you mean, "shouldn't"?

EDITH

Anna, How can you hope to make him a good wife?

ANNA

How? I love him. And when the baby comes, we'll be there for him ...And...and he loves me.

EDITH

But in his position, he needs someone of his class. Anna, he is barrister.

ANNA

(proudly at first, then suspicious)

He is? Does he say that in this letter?

EDITH

(catching herself.)

Yes. Yes, he does. Anna, you might be an embarrassment to him.

ANNA

No. I'll take care of his house. It's what I was brought up to.

EDITH

He doesn't want a maid.

ANNA

He loves me.

EDITH

Does he? Is it you he loves?

(Music begins)

ANNA

Of course it is. Who else would it be? Mrs. Harnham, he love me. He says so. In the letters to me.

EDITH

LETTERS TO YOU?

NOW WE'VE HIT THE POINT

WHO WROTE THE LETTERS?

ANNA

YOU DID

EDITH

THAT IS THE POINT YOU'VE EXCLUDED
LETTERS TO YOU?
BUT WHO HELD THE PEN?

ANNA

YOU

EDITH

THAT'S WHAT WE BOTH DECIDED
AND WHO READ YOU THE LETTERS?
I DID
THE NOTES NEEDING ANSWERS GREW MASSIVE
BUT WITH EACH PASSING MISSIVE
YOU GREW MORE PASSIVE

ANNA

But it was me who told you what to write. They was my feelings. My thoughts.

EDITH

Don't be ridiculous. If I had written what you wanted me to write, we would never have gotten a single reply and he would never have proposed. He fell in love with the letters. Don't you understand. With the woman in the lines. And now the truth must be told.

ANNA

No! He loves me. You wasn't there that day. After the fair.

EDITH

(pitying her at first.)

The fair is over. THIS is after the fair. Open your eyes, Anna.

THERE'S A WOMAN
HE'S IN LOVE WITH
SHE HAS WON HIS HEART THROUGH HIS MIND
YOU ARE NOT THAT WOMAN
HE WILL VERY SOON FIND

ANNA

Don't say that.

EDITH

THERE'S A WOMAN
HE WILL LONG FOR
IT IS WRONG FOR YOU TO PRETEND
YOU ARE NOT THAT WOMAN
AND THE FARCE HAS TO END

ANNA

I'm not listening.

EDITH

(beginning to scold Anna.)

HOW CAN YOU IMAGINE
YOU WOULD EVER FIT THE BILL?
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT LOVE IS
AND YOU NEVER WILL
YOU WERE NEVER UP TO
PLAYING OUT THE ROLE
YOU MAY HAVE TOUCHED HIS BODY
BUT THE WOMAN HAS TOUCHED HIS SOUL

THERE'S A WOMAN
WHOM HE WRITES TO
THEY SPEND NIGHTS TOGETHER IN THOUGHT
YOU WERE NEVER THAT WOMEN
AND YOU'RE SURE TO BE CAUGHT

THERE'S A WOMAN
DON'T FORGET HER!
SHE'S YOUR BETTER, WHY CAN'T YOU SEE?
YOU'RE JUST A GIRL
BUT THE FACT IS THAT WOMAN IS...

(Edith puts her hand to her mouth before she can utter the last word. Anna stops her too.)

ANNA

(near tears.)

Mrs. Harnham! Please.

EDITH

(trying to regain control and confess in her way.)

This has to end, Anna. If nothing else, can't you see its effect on me?

ANNA
(Stupid as ever.)

But it can't have any.

EDITH

Why not?

ANNA

Because you are married already.

EDITH
(one last ditch effort)

Anna, we must tell him all. That I've been writing the letters for you. He must know what is real.

ANNA
(getting frightened. In tears.)

What is real? He knows what is real. That day in the field. That's real. Not fancy poetry. Oh no, It's you that don't know what is real.

YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS REAL?
WORDS ON A PAGE AIN'T THE ANSWER
A LETTER ADDRESSED WITH A SEAL
THAT'S NOT WHAT'S REAL
WHAT I HAD IS REAL

(As Anna, who is almost shaking, describes the physical pleasures with a vengeful glee through her tears, Edith is hurt by every line. She knows that she will never have this side of the relationship. Anna doesn't want her to tell him about the letters. Her future is on the line. She is like a tigress protecting her child.)

THE TOUCH OF HIS HAND
THAT MAKES YOU GO WEAK
THE RUB OF HIS STUBBLE
AGAINST YOUR CHEEK
THE SMOOTH OF HIS BROW
THE STRENGTH OF HIS ARM
YOU KNOW WHEN HE HOLDS YOU
YOU CAN'T COME TO HARM
THE WARM OF HIS BREATH
THE HAIR ON HIS CHEST
SO SOFT AS IT LIES THERE
RIGHT NEAR YOUR BREAST
A PAPER AND PEN
COULD NEVER COMPARE

ANNA (cont.)

TO HOLDING HIM CLOSE
AND RUFFLING HIS HAIR
THE THINGS THAT YOU WROTE
CAN'T TOUCH WHAT WE FEEL
IT'S NEVER BEEN WORDS
WHAT IS REAL
A PARAGRAPH
AIN'T LIKE HIS LAUGH
THAT IS WHAT IS REAL

EDITH

(Hurt and fighting back.)

You ignorant child!

(The two woman face each other and finally speak the truth.)

EDITH

THERE'S A WOMAN
HE'S IN LOVE WITH
SHE HAS WON HIS HEART
THOUGH HIS MIND
YOU ARE NOT THAT WOMAN
HE WILL VERY SOON FIND
THERE'S A WOMAN
HE WILL LONG FOR
IT IS WRONG FOR
YOU TO PRETEND
YOU ARE NOT THAT WOMAN
AND THE FARCE HAS TO END
HOW CAN YOU IMAGINE
YOU WOULD EVER
FIT THE BILL?
YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT
LOVE IS
AND YOU NEVER WILL
YOU WERE NEVER UP TO
PLAYING OUT THE ROLE
YOU MAY HAVE TOUCHED
HIS BODY
BUT THE WOMAN
HAS TOUCHED HIS SOUL
THERE'S A WOMAN
WHOM HE WRITES TO
THEY SPEND NIGHTS TO-
GETHER IN THOUGHT
YOU WILL NEVER BE THE
WOMEN HE IMAGINES

ANNA

THE TOUCH OF HIS HAND
THAT MAKES YOU GO WEAK

THE RUB OF HIS STUBBLE

AGAINST YOUR CHEEK
THE SMOOTH HIS BROW
THE STRENGTH OF HIS ARM

YOU KNOW WHEN HE HOLDS YOU
YOU CAN'T COME TO HARM

THE WARM OF HIS BREATH

THE HAIR ON HIS CHEST

SO SOFT AS IT LIES THERE

RIGHT NEAR YOUR BREAST

A PAPER AND PEN
CAN NEVER COMPARE
TO HOLDING HIM CLOSE
AND RUFFLING HIS HAIR
THE THINGS THAT YOU WROTE
CAN'T TOUCH WHAT WE FEEL

EDITH

AND YOU'RE CERTAIN
TO BE CAUGHT
THERE'S A WOMAN
DON'T FORGET HER,
SHE'S YOUR BETTER,
WHY CAN'T YOU SEE
HE'S A MAN WHO MISTAKENLY
PAID A LITTLE
MIND TO A BABE
IN A CRADLE, BUT HE LOVES
A WOMEN, THO SHE'LL NEVER
BE FREE
YOU'RE JUST A GIRL,
BUT THE FACT IS
THAT WOMAN IS ME

ANNA

IT'S NEVER BEEN WORDS
WHAT IS REAL

A PARAGRAPH

AIN'T LIKE HIS LAUGH

THAT IS WHAT IS

REAL

(Exhausted and in tears the two woman stand looking at each other.)

ANNA

This baby is real. And it's mine.

EDITH

Have I been so cruel to you?

ANNA

(Desperate.)

I'm sorry, Mum. I'm sorry. But I love him so. Please don't tell him now. Please. If he don't marry me, what will come to me? And I am getting on with my writing too. I practice every day.

EDITH

(Almost coming out of it.)

Do you, Anna?

ANNA

Yes, And even though I find it so hard, I shall do well...If I keep trying. Please, Mum.

EDITH

I'm sorry, Anna. I can't go on with this charade. I can not.

ANNA

No, mum. You must. (*Putting a pen into Edith's hand*) Here. This is how you start. Just like you did so long ago...

(*As if willing Edith to write*)

BELOVED

WHAT RAPTURE TO READ WHAT YOU SAY

THO' WORDS CANNOT CAPTURE WHAT I FEEL TODAY...

(*As the music continues, Edith looks at Anna's copy book.*)

EDITH

You are right, Anna. About what is real. But we are only one half each. Neither is the whole woman.

ANNA

I don't pretend to understand. But I do feel that we are part of each other, Mum. And I know you will always be in my heart.

EDITH

(*After a beat, with new determination.*)

Anna, you must concentrate on writing your name as I write it here. You will have to sign the marriage certificate yourself.

ANNA

(*Utter relief.*)

Yes, Mrs. Harnham. Thank you, Mrs. Harnham, thank you.

(*Anna kisses her mistress's hand*)

EDITH

Begin, Anna.

BOTH

AND REMEMBER TILL THEN I'M YOUR ANNA...

(As the lights dim on the women, a spot finds Charles in London.)

CHARLES

ONE HUNDRED MILES AWAY
MY ANNA'S WAITING THERE
AS I AWAIT THE DAY THAT SHE ARRIVES
EACH NIGHT I GIVE MY THANKS
THAT SOON WE'LL JOIN THE RANKS
OF MEN AND WIVES

(A light finds Edith and Arthur.)

ARTHUR

Well, Edith, I understand there is to be a blessed event.

EDITH

What?

ARTHUR

Polly told me that Anna is to be married.

EDITH

Oh yes, she is.

ARTHUR

Ah...you must be very proud of your accomplishment.

EDITH

Oddly enough, I am.

ARTHUR

ONE HUNDRED MILES AWAY
MY WIFE WILL HAVE A TEST
THIS FINAL TEST WILL PROVE JUST WHO SURVIVES
MY FATE WILL BE REVEALED
OR LIKE THE LETTERS - SEALED
BY MEN AND WIVES

(It is a another day as the light finds Edith and Anna.)

ANNA

Oh, thank you for the dress, Mrs. I don't know how we could have ever fought. You're the only friend I got.

EDITH
(Truly touched.)

Thank you, Anna. Well, let's try it on.

(Anna begins to get into the dress as the women disappear and a light finds Arthur.)

CHARLES

AND THE NURSERY IS WAITING
AND THE ROCKING HORSE IS CARVED
AND THE CRADLE'S BY THE WINDOW
THAT LOOKS OUT INTO THE GARDEN
AS IT THRIVES
ON THE DREAMS OF LUCKY MEN AND WIVES

ANNA

What does he mean in the letter - a private wedding?

EDITH
(making light of it.)

No fuss. No bother. No guests.

(The women disappear as Charles sings:)

ANNA

But you will come along with me, Mum? I wouldn't know what to say to him. You will come.

EDITH

Yes, I will, Anna. *(To herself.)* After all, one must be in on the death of a dream..

ARTHUR

SO IF I LET HER GO
PERHAPS SHE WILL RETURN
AND BRING WITH HER THE HOPE WITHIN THE PAIN
IF I AM UNAFRAID
WE MAY JOIN THE PARADE
OF MEN AND WIVES AGAIN

(It is still another day as the light finds Edith and Arthur. Edith is dressed for travel.)

EDITH

Well, Arthur, I shall see you tomorrow.

ARTHUR

Of course, dear...

(She exits.)

THO THE NURSERY'S STILL WAITING
AND THE ROCKING HORSE IS GONE
MUST THE CRADLE SITTING EMPTY
BE A SYMBOL OF THE COUPLE
AND THEIR LIVES
OR ARE THERE DREAMS FOR LONELY MEN AND WIVES?

CHARLES

Hurry home, Anna.

ARTHUR

Hurry home, Edith.

(The light come up strong on the men. Both hoping for the future.)

CHARLES

ONE HUNDRED MILES FROM NOW

ARTHUR

ONE HUNDRED MILES FROM NOW

CHARLES

WE'LL BE A FAMILY

ARTHUR

WE MAY YET BE A FAMILY

CHARLES

THE HAPPY ENDING'S COMING UP AT LAST

ARTHUR

FOR SOMETHING SHOULD LAST

BOTH

THE FUTURE IS WHAT DRIVES
THE HOPES OF MEN AND WIVES

CHARLES

AND THE FUTURE...

ARTHUR

YES, THE FUTURE...

CHARLES

IS COMING...

ARTHUR

IT'S COMING FAST

CHARLES

FAST

(During the above Charles has come to get Anna and they stand in front of an imaginary judge, who marries them. Edith watches from a few feet away, witnessing the event. The couple nods and as the silent ceremony ends, they kiss. The lights quickly blackout and come up in Charles flat in London. The women and Charles are in the living room. There is a small wedding cake and Anna is cutting slices and serving through this like a maid. There are several unwrapped gifts: all very large books. There is a pall over the whole scene.)

(As the lights change, Edith and Charles laugh.)

CHARLES

Mrs. Harnham, you have a rare sense of humor.

EDITH

Thank you, Mr. Raye.

ANNA

Cake?

CHARLES

Please. There's one more wedding gift. From my dear friend William.

(She opens it. It is a large book. She looks at it and shows it to Charles and Edith.)

ANNA

(Not exactly thrilled.)

Ah. Another book. Very nice. Tea?

EDITH

Thank you, Anna.

CHARLES

You do look lovely, darling, in that fashionable dress. Although I must admit I was first taken with you in your country gown. That evening on the back of a wooden horse at the fair. It seems a million years ago.

(There is a silence.)

ANNA

(flatly.)

Mrs. Harnham gave me this dress.

CHARLES

You have been a true and loyal friend, Mrs. Harnham. Thank you for being our witness.

EDITH

How could I miss it? Why I've practically lived through this relationship with you.

CHARLES

Yes, Anna has mentioned you in her letters. Anna, did you know that Mrs. Harnham really helped me to make up my mind?

ANNA

About what?

CHARLES

About marrying. We must always be grateful to her.

ANNA

Thank you.

EDITH

Not at all, Anna.

CHARLES

Anna, dear, it is like the quote you once reminded me of. From one of Shelley's scraps...
(Anna continues cutting the cake in silence.)

Anna? The cake can wait.

(Anna puts the piece back into the cake. Or tries to.)

Oh never mind. Mrs. Harnham, my darling is so flurried that she doesn't know what she is doing or saying.

(Anna brings him the squashed piece of cake.)

Thank you, darling. I have been so looking forward to our conversations.

EDITH

(After a silence.)

I think the piece of which you spoke was about the quiet of the country, Mr. Raye.

(Anna looks pointedly at Charles and there is another silence.)

I think I know its meaning now. The country will seem very quiet without Anna there. The hills and streams will not be the same. We will all miss her.

CHARLES

And will you miss the country, Anna?

ANNA

No.

(There is a silence.)

CHARLES

Well...perhaps a bit of "country" quiet is necessary. Mrs. Harnham and I have been frothing at the mouth all through our celebration.

ANNA

Yes...

CHARLES
(After an uneasy laugh.)

Are you interested in family histories, Mrs. Harnham?

EDITH

Yes. Yes, I am.

CHARLES

Then you may be particularly interested in our family bible. Five generations of Rayes have inscribed their innermost thoughts on important family occasions. Births, deaths...

EDITH
(With trepidation)

And marriages?

CHARLES

Yes...Before you go, Mrs. Harnham, I'm sure that Anna and I would be honored if you would witness *our* inscriptions. Wouldn't we, Anna?

ANNA

Inscriptions?

CHARLES

Yes. Something deep and lasting, that we can pass on to our children. I'll write mine first. I know just what I want to say.

(Charles writes as Anna and Edith share secret frightened looks)

ANNA

More cake, Mrs?

EDITH

No, Anna, I'm sorry.

CHARLES

(finishing up and handing Anna the pen)

There. Anna...

(Anna sits down to write. Charles and Edith watch. Charles looks at her inscription and is horrified.)

What's this? Is it a joke?

ANNA
(Very frightened.)

No.

CHARLES

But it's the spelling of a child and the ideas of a goose. What does it mean?

ANNA
(through her tears.)

It means that I can't do it any better.

CHARLES

Oh, nonsense! You can do better.

ANNA

I can't!

CHARLES

What do you mean?

ANNA

I mean I can't. I didn't write those letters, Charles. She wrote them. I only told her what to write. And not always that. But I am learning. Soon I'll even be able to read...a bit..

(She is on her knees now begging.)

And I do love you so. (Music begins.)

You'll forgive me, won't you? Won't you, my dear, dear, husband.

CHARLES

IS THAT WHAT IT WAS?

ANNA

Charles.

CHARLES

YES THAT'S WHAT IT WAS

(Turning to Edith.)

YOU WERE HER SCRIBE THROUGH IT ALL
NONE OF THE WORDS CAME FROM HER

EDITH

SOME.

CHARLES

THAT'S WHAT IT WAS ALL ALONG

EDITH

NO
YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG
THE WORDS MAY BE MINE
THE THOUGHTS AND THE FEELINGS WERE HER'S BUT...

CHARLES

YOU WROTE LETTERS TO ME?

EDITH

YES

CHARLES

SOME YOU DID NOT EVEN SEE?

ANNA

YES

CHARLES

HOW CAN TWO BE DIVIDED BY THREE?

ANNA

YES, IT'S TRUE, CHARLES
SHE HELD THE PAPER AND PEN
BUT THE FEELING WE HAD IN THE FIELD
WE CAN SURELY HAVE THAT AGAIN

CHARLES
(Angrily quoting the letters)

"EVERY MORNING I RUN
JUST TO GREET YOU"
DID YOU WRITE THAT
AND IS A WORD OF IT REAL?
HOW DO I KNOW WHAT'S THE TRUTH
AND IF YOU CAN EVEN FEEL WHAT SHE SAID THAT YOU FEEL

ANNA

I love you, Charles.

CHARLES

DO YOU? AND SO WHAT IF YOU DO
WHICH PART OF THE WOMAN I LOVE ARE YOU?
AM I DREAMING AND IF I'M NOT
WHAT AM LEFT WITH
WHAT HAVE I GOT?

ANNA

I'm your wife.

CHARLES
(to the point of insanity)

WHAT HAVE I GOT?

(to Anna)

You should have worn your country clothes.

(Anna runs out of the room leaving Charles alone with Edith. He takes the letters out of the drawer and begins to quote the beginning of one.)

CHARLES

"EVERY MORNING I RUN
JUST TO GREET YOU"

(He throws the letter down at her feet.)

EDITH
(Almost to herself)

Oh, my God.

CHARLES

WHO WOULD EVER THINK THAT WORDS
DESIGNED TO WIN YOU
COULD DEFEAT YOU?
AND YOUR WORDS WERE MUSIC
LEADING ME ALONG
WHO KNEW WHEN THEY WERE THROUGH
THERE WOULD BE NO SONG?

EDITH

I ONLY WROTE WHAT SHE ASKED ME TO...

CHARLES

HOW YOU TWO MUST HAVE LAUGHED
TO DECEIVE ME
TO BURST INTO MY LIFE
AND BRING ME MUSIC
JUST TO LEAVE ME
AND YOUR WORDS WERE MUSIC
DRIFTING OFF TOO SOON
LEAVING ME WITH ONLY
AN UNFINISHED TUNE

EDITH

YES, I PENNED EVERY NOTE
BUT IT WAS *SHE* WHO FELT WHAT I WROTE
NOT I...

CHARLES
(He grabs her.)

CAN'T YOU SEE WHAT YOU'VE DONE?
UNDERCOVER
IN THE MUSIC THAT WE SHARE
I DISCOVER

EDITH

No...

CHARLES

YOU'RE MY LOVER

EDITH

NO!

CHARLES

THE QUESTION NOW IS WHY
CONTINUE TO DENY
THE PASSION THAT HAS OPENED ALL THE DOORS?

EDITH

(Answering in the negative.)

I NEVER MEANT A WORD...

CHARLES

(Taking her to the letters on the floor.)

COME, ARE THESE HER WORDS
IN ALL THE LETTERS
THAT TURNED TO MUSIC
OR IS THE MUSIC YOURS?

EDITH

(Her emotions on the surface. Still denying all.)

Hush.

CHARLES

I will not hush! Why should you disguise the full truth, when you already told half of it? I will kiss you. If it was all pure invention in those letters, give me your cheek only. If you meant what you said, let it be lips. It is for the first and last time.

(After a moment, she gives her lips and they kiss as the music swells.)

EDITH

(Now that he really knows.)

Can you ever forgive me?

CHARLES

Yes.

EDITH

But you are ruined.

CHARLES

What does it matter? It serves me right.

EDITH

(in an attempt to win him in some way...he turns his back on her)

EVERY MORNING I RUN
JUST TO GREET YOU
I READ YOU IN A FLASH
AND WHEN I NEED TO
I RE-READ YOU...

(The two stand transfixed for a moment and then Anna enters the room with Edith's coat, hat and bag. She is trying to be composed.)

ANNA

(gently and sincerely.)

Here are your things, Mrs. Harnham. I wouldn't want you to miss your train.

EDITH

Thank you, Anna.

ANNA

No, thank you, Mrs. Harnham. For everything. My husband and I hope that you will visit us again. When our baby arrives.

EDITH

Good-bye, Anna. Good-bye, Mr. Raye.

(Edith exits the room without looking back. Edith's room appears on one side of the stage and she enters into its darkness. Anna tries to kiss Charles, who is stone. She then goes to the writing desk to continue the inscription. Charles picks up the discarded letters. Simultaneously, Edith pulls out a box, opens it and takes out the be-ribboned letters and begins taking them out and reading them. Charles does the same. Arthur enters this dim room to find Edith covered in letters and reading. He clears his throat.)

EDITH

(Startled and disoriented.)

Who's that?

ARTHUR

Your husband - who should it be?

CHARLES

Never mind the inscription, Anna.

EDITH

Ah, Arthur. I almost forgot I had a husband...

(Arthur picks up a discarded letter and begins reading it. He looks at Edith.)

ARTHUR

Well...but perhaps I have forgotten that I have a wife.

(Anna smiles and kisses his hand.)

ANNA

Don't worry, Charles. Everything's going to be all right.

ARTHUR

Will you miss Anna, Mrs. Harnham?

EDITH

I don't know.

ARTHUR

(Referring to the letters.)

I will not. There have been far too many people in the house.

EDITH

(Half understanding the implication.)

Have there, Arthur?

ANNA

I did feel everything in the letters, Charles.

CHARLES

Did you, Anna?

ANNA

Yes. Didn't you?

CHARLES

Oh yes. Yes.

(Charles walks over to the desk.)

ARTHUR

How amazing that all of this was brought about by that blasted fair. Maybe I should have attended. Who knows what the aftereffects might have been then?

EDITH

One must attend the fair, Arthur. No matter what occurs

(Arthur gently and tenderly puts his hand on Edith's shoulder. This is the biggest gesture that he can make. Edith puts her hand over his. There is hope for this couple.)

ANNA

(Staring straight out. Empty)

Yes. You and me and our baby are going to be just fine.

EDITH

(Edith winds the music box that Anna has given her and we are back at the beginning of the show. Arthur goes to his spot and sorts the morning post. It is 7 months later. Only Charles does not sing or even move.)

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE...

ARTHUR

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE...

ANNA

SOMETIMES IN A LIFE...

TRIO

THERE COMES A MOMENT

(Arthur finds an interesting letter)

EDITH

WHEN THE MUSIC AND THE LIGHTS...

ARTHUR

WHEN THE MUSIC AND THE LIGHTS...

ANNA

WHEN THE MUSIC AND THE LIGHTS...

TRIO

COME TOGETHER

EDITH

AND NOTHING

ARTHUR

AND NOTHING

ANNA

AND NOTHING

CHARLES

(coming to life for the first time as Arthur brings the letter to Edith.)

NO, NOTHING WILL NEVER BE THE...

ARTHUR

This came for you, dear.

CHARLES

(almost savagely)

Beloved...How could I not write?

(Edith takes the letter and looks at it and then at Arthur. What will she do? Arthur, Anna, Charles and Edith, each of the lights goes out, as if four candles are snuffed out, one at a time.)

CURTAIN.