

Scene 2

Dinner. Mary and John are setting the table. John is talking. John has been talking. For a very long time.

John: But that's parents for you, am I right? So what if you're one of the youngest physicians to have ever graduated from the Edinburgh Medical School? Everything I did just pissed them off— especially when I told them I was going to be following LB around Europe. But what can I say? I suppose I've always been a bit of a "bad boy."

Mary: Tooooooally.

John: Even then, how could I pass it up? Free room and board with England's greatest writer? Plus per diems? I mean, *you* know, right?

Mary: Yep, gotta carpe those per diems while you can...

She crosses to the window and looks out.

John: But even more so, it was Lady Literature's siren song that called me hence, for though I wield the scapula, the quill was my first love.

Mary: Uh huh... (*Looks out the window*) Jesus Christ, storm, hurry it up.

Willmouse enters, carrying some large books.

Mary: Doing some light reading, are you, son?

Willmouse: How very droll, Mother. You know I already read these on the cart-ride hither. Now they are destined for a higher purpose...

He stacks them on his seat at the head of the table and sits on them, now able to see over its top.

Willmouse: Much better.

John: Now you can finally talk to us— on our level!

Willmouse looks to Mary.

Willmouse: Mother, he's doing it again.

Mary: Just ignore him.

John scans Willmouse's books. He spots one he recognizes and holds it up. Willmouse thumps down in his seat a few inches.

Willmouse: Hey what's the big idea—

John: Lookie here, Mary! Doesn't this look familiar?

Mary scans the title and turns away.

John: *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. It left me feeling so... what's the word, vindicated?

Willmouse: Sadly, *not* a thesaurus?

John: So, what says old 'mummy dearest'?

He begins to scan through the pages for some old chestnuts, but Mary plucks the book away.

Mary: I appreciate it, John, really. You are very kind, and admittedly my late mother gets rather short shrift these days. But I'm not really in the mood for a public reading.

She hands the book to Willmouse.

Mary: Willmouse, would you please return this to the vault?

Willmouse nods and adds it back to the stack. Mary excuses herself.

John: (*Indicating Mary*) Is she always like this?

Willmouse: Like what?

John: So... gloomy? The weather is brighter than she.

Willmouse: Yes, I mean who doesn't light up when given the chance to discuss their mother's tragic end? What a buzzkill.

John: Riiight? She's so... mysterious. Intellectual, surely, and clever, no doubt. But ever so melancholy...

Willmouse: And always on her phone.

The door blows open, and Percy, LB, and Claire enter in raincoats, clutching paper bags.

Percy: We're back! Lord, thought we were going to drown out there.

LB: Ooh, how foreboding, love that for you, Perce. I do hope we got enough food. *(To John)* You didn't want any food, eh Polly?

John: Very funny. *(Pause)* Did you really not get me any food?

Claire: Oh don't worry. LB was very generous.

LB: Uh... yeah... Say, Candice, why don't you swing in the kitchen and grab us some plates?

Claire: I'll be right back. *(Meaningfully)* Save some chicken balls for me.

She exits. LB shudders.

LB: I don't know how you stand that woman.

Percy: Oh she's not that bad... I mean, sure: did I realize that - by asking Mary to elope with me - it meant she would bring her step-sister along? Or did I realize that she would literally always be hanging around all the time?? Criticizing and deconstructing my every word and gesture???

It's cool.

LB: You're a better man than I. Not really, but you get what I mean. If I'd known she was going to turn into a Grade-A clinger, I never would have deflowered her.

Willmouse: May I please remind you, gentlemen: I am four.

John sidles up to Percy and LB.

John: So, fellow players, on what topic are we dialoguing? Poetry? Prose??? I do love poetry, especially the rhyming sort. But I also like prose. You know, Percy— can I call you Percy?

Percy isn't sure.

John: I'm something of a writer myself.

LB: Enough, ye goober. We were discussing Claire. (*Lightbulb*) You know, I think you two would get on like a house on fire! Why, remember just earlier today when you were telling me how hot you thought Percy's wife was?

John looks at Percy suddenly, very embarrassed and exposed.

John: Oh, no, I just— Perhaps you misheard me—

Percy: It's cool. She is hot.

LB: Well, since *she's* spoken for by this little Don Juan (*Percy*), why not take a crack at the younger one? She's just like Mary, only less - you know - like, deeply sad about every one of her life choices.

Percy: Uhhhhhhhhhhhh?

Claire and Mary re-enter in conversation, getting dinner sorted.

LB: Look at her, Polly: fulsome curls, a speckless hide, most of her teeth? Right, Percy?

Percy: What? Oh, uh, yeah... (*Sexily*) She's always biting stuff... *Chewing... gum...*

John: (*To LB*) I thought you said she was insufferable! Didn't you bail out of England just to get away from her?

LB: Don't be reductive. I left England to escape *several* romantic entanglements.

Percy: How is your wife?

LB: Meh.

Mary: Dinner's ready.

They sit and Mary and Claire dole out boxes of Chinese food from the paper bags.

Mary: Thanks for dinner.

Percy: Yeah, thanks for spotting me, LB. How was I to know that the Swiss-Chinese-food restaurant wouldn't accept British pounds?

LB: Don't mention it. After all, what good is having all the money in the world if you can't rub it in everyone's face?

Willmouse: (*Examining the boxes*) Yes, we are truly gaining the full Swiss experience... Now, Mother, if you would be so kind...

Mary leans forward and cuts his food into little bite-sized mouthfuls for him.

Willmouse: Thank you.

LB: (*Denying an offer of food*) None for me.

Percy: Not hungry?

LB: I'm on a diet. Trying one of these new trends where I ingest nothing but green tea and cookies. Speaking of which...

He cracks open a fortune cookie.

LB: (*Reading his fortune*) "You shall die in Missolonghi, Greece, from fever and subsequent bloodletting." (*Laughs*) These darn things are always so general: they could apply to anybody!

Percy: I'm surprised you could get away from London, LB. You're always so busy.

LB: Oh, it was nothing a little scandal couldn't clear up.

Mary: What now?

LB: Ooh, "what now?" Listen to her. She's a cheeky little harridan, eh Percy?

Percy: Ha ha... Yes, usually I just call her Mary, though— (*Trying his hand at casual misogyny*) You know how women are...

LB: Well, *Mary*, I know you expect the worst of me, but I daresay you'll be disappointed... For it was Love that cast me from England.

Percy: Everything alright with Anne?

LB: Oh yes, we have come to an arrangement.

John: More of a legal agreement.

Percy: Legal?

Claire: He means a divorce.

The word "divorce" resounds like a klaxon. Forks drop. Chopsticks snap. Willmouse does a huge, milky spit-take.

Percy: A divorce?

Mary: Good god!

Willmouse: Mother, are we going to hell because we had dinner with a divorced person?

Mary: Yes, son. I believe we are.

Willmouse falls to praying.

LB: Holy crow, you Shelleys are a tense little bunch of nerve-endings. It's not like I murdered anyone.

Mary: I wish you had, LB... I really do.

Percy: She's right. I mean, murder is a sin, but divorce?! Maybe *someday* it'll be seen as commonplace...

Mary: Let us hope not!

Percy: But these days... Well it's just not done, old boy.

Claire: Exactly. You just suffer through until you die prematurely, as God intended. Take the Shelleys here. Sure, Percy has a wife back in London, and sure, he still decided to woo, nail, and subsequently elope with my sister, but even *he* has the dignity not to ask for a divorce. No, he'll just wait for her to die and then remarry.

Mary: *(Taking his hand, fondly)* I guess we're just old fashioned.

John: Come on, everybody. It's a good thing! LB - and poor Anne for that matter - were miserable! Now they both have a chance to begin anew.

An awkward silence. They sit in it, like a stinky cloud. At length, Percy takes a stab at conversation:

Percy: So John, you're a doctor? That sounds very period-appropriate. Where did you go to school?

Mary: *(Stealthily trying to interject, too late)* No no, for the love of Christ—

John: The University of Edinburgh!

LB: He wrote his thesis on sleepwalking. It's a real snooze.

Percy: I think it sounds interesting.

LB: *(Still fishing)* I said, it's a real snooze!

Claire: Then perhaps you can help Percy here.

John: Oh, do you suffer from Somnambulism, Master Shelley?

Percy: Nah, I just sleepwalk.

Mary: And sleep talk, not to mention the night terrors, lucid dreaming, waking dreaming, bed wetting, the whole shebang.

Percy: And one time, I dreamt I was a penguin.

John: That is very interesting. Your subconscious must be wildly troubled.

Percy: *(Chuckles)* Yeah, probably!

John: However, were I to do it all over again, I think I'd have pursued something a bit loftier. Something no one else has ever done, you know?

Claire: Like what?

Mary: Here we go.

John: Oh, I don't know... Perhaps, re-animation?

Percy: You mean, like, Saturday morning reruns?

Willmouse: Nay, Pater. Rather, I believe the good doctor here is referring to the art of resurrection: bringing back those who have succumbed to Death's icy tingle. You know, just before the elopement, I was discussing this matter with a boy from my daycare, Charles; he was telling me about experiments conducted by his own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin.

John: (*A little condescendingly*) Oh? And what did this little "Charles Darwin" scamp tell you, boy?

Willmouse: Only that his philosopher-scientist grandfather observed that vorticella—

Percy: That's a fine Italian noodle.

Everyone else: That's vermicelli.

Willmouse: That the microscopic organisms known as vorticella, after having been dried out for months and being - for all purposes - *dead*, may still revive and show signs of life when placed in water.

Mary: Please, Willmouse, stop talking about reviving the dead at the dinner table. I don't know why I have to keep telling you that.

Willmouse: (*To John*) We'll talk later. It's nice to have another man of science on this trip.

John tousles Willmouse's hair.

LB: Well, once those infernal tabloid vultures have finally buggered off, we'll have to have you all over for some *pizza*. Have you ever had it? It's pretty good.

John: We can fire up the jacuzzi, make a day of it. I think I even saw some water skis in the garage.

Claire: I'll say it again, I doubt we'll be out on the water much.

LB: The sun might come out.

Mary: Claire's right. I wouldn't hold your breath.

LB looks at Percy and rolls his eyes, hugely: There she goes again!"

John: Has anyone checked the weather?

Mary: On it.

She takes out her phone. Meanwhile:

Percy: So where are you off to after this?

John: Oh, who's to say? I've always wanted to learn Armenian - the language of love - but then—

Mary gasps suddenly.

Claire: What is it?

Mary: Oh my god...

Percy: Is everything okay?

Mary: It's horrible...

Willmouse: Can someone fetch me a glass of milk? I am a child.

LB: What happened, did England leave the European Union? Ha ha, seriously though. Can you imagine them ever doing something so stupid?

Mary: No, it's... oh god. A volcano erupted in Indonesia. It's killed over 100 000 people.

Everyone (except LB) takes out their phones to check for themselves.

Claire: Jesus...

Willmouse: *(Clarifying anxiously)* But the Union is fine?

John: What's it say, Mary?

Mary: "Indonesian officials evacuated several thousand people from nearby villages after the volcano began to erupt on Friday. Mount Tambora is among the world's most dangerous volcanoes; this eruption is the largest in human history, raining ash as far as Borneo."

Claire: Yikes.

LB: Oh no, I love Borneo!

Willmouse shakes his empty cup and clears his throat, thirstily.

Mary: There's even a hashtag... #iStandWithMountTambora... That feels misleading.

Claire: People are uploading a red square to Instagram to show their solidarity. That's a nice idea.

The group nods. A moment of clicking and scrolling.

John: Wait! This site says that the red square is problematic...

Claire: Oh, shoot...

More clicking.

Mary: Wait, are we all doing the red square or not?

Percy: I'm leaving it up.

Mary considers.

Mary: Okay. *(Clicks)* Delete.

She deletes something and puts her phone down.

Percy: So that means this weather is... what, ash? *(People nod)* That's impossible! I mean, Indonesia's so far away! *(To Willmouse)* Right? *(Willmouse nods)* Right. Surely it can't get all the way here.

John: How else would you explain these clouds?

Percy: I dunno... End of Days?

Claire: In that case, I'm having seconds.

Mary: Let's not make any rash decisions until we hear from an authority!

John: Thank you, Claire. In my professional opinion, this—

Mary noisily grabs a fortune cookie and tears it out of the plastic.

John: Oh.

Mary: *(Reads)* Hmm.

Percy: What's it say, dear?

Mary: "It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world."

A weird silence.

LB: Well that could mean anything.

The power goes out with a loud, strange noise.

Willmouse: Great. Now the milk shall go bad.

Scene 3

Complete darkness. Figures move through the house, bumping into one another occasionally.

Percy: Oops—

John: Sorry.

Mary: *(Off)* Anyone's internet working?

Percy: *(Off)* No.

Shuffle shuffle. Bump.

LB: Augh, who's that.

John: Just me!

LB: Who's me?

John lights himself with his phone's flashlight. LB cringes.

LB: Jesus. You look like a ghoul!

Darkness. Shuffle shuffle. Bump.

LB: Pardon me!

Claire: Quite all right, darling.

Hushed tones:

LB: Claire! Let go of that.

Claire: Come now, Georgie, you needn't pretend.

LB: Stop, someone will see— Oh myyy—

Claire: Just pretend we're back in London. You didn't care if anyone saw us back then. In fact, I seem to recall that was something of an added bonus—

LB: It's just that my scurvy is acting up, you know? Fruit *and* vegetables, in this economeeeeeeee— Oooh my goodness—

Claire: Aren't you glad you answered my invitation?

LB: *Your* invitation? I knew it! Now, unhand that!

Huge noise of someone falling down the stairs.

Claire: Jesus Christ, are you alright?

Percy: Hmm? Oh yes, just dropped something...

Claire: Your entire body?

Percy: Luckily something seems to have broken my fall...

John: That would be me...

LB: John! I say, that was awfully brave of you, throwing yourself underneath that poor emerging artist.

John: Right, well, I think I've effed up my ankle.

Claire: Come on, Perce, let's get him on the fainting couch.

Percy: But he's still conscious.

LB: Come on!

They help him. Grunts of labour.

Between them, Willmouse is suddenly illuminated by a flashlight, lit from below.

Willmouse: I found a flashlight.

LB: Not now, you little ragamuffin.

Willmouse: Never meet your heroes...

John is helped onto the couch.

Claire: Jeez, watch it! I'm sitting here!

John: Sorry, Miss Clairmont. I hurt my ankle, you know.

Mary appears, carrying some candlesticks.

Mary: Look what I found!

Claire: Oh good.

Mary: And I called the homeowner using the landline. They said this is all there is, but they'll get us some more by the end of the week...

Claire: Drat. Anyways, we should probably figure out where everyone is sleeping.

LB: Come, Polly, back to the villa. We don't want to intrude. And I mean, your space is already sooo very limited.

Percy: Oh pish, there's plenty of room. You can sleep with Claire.

LB: *Waugh!* I mean! We can't impose any more than we already have. It's not that far.

He opens the door to reveal a gale of biblical proportions. Thunder and lightning blast. The wind and rain barrage them through the door. Mary turns to keep the candles from going out.

Mary: BYRON!

John: CLOSE THE DOOR!

LB: I THINK IT'S CALMING DOWN.

Percy and Claire force him back in.

LB: Very well. But only for one to three months! We don't want to overstay our welcome.

Mary: Yes, that would be terrible. Percy, apparently there's a futon downstairs. Will you help me bring it up?

Percy: But I'm siiick—

Mary: Percy Bysshe Shelley, I swear to god...

They exit.

Claire: *(To LB, seductively)* Percy's offer to share a bed still stands, you know... It's real *lumpy*.

LB: Here that, Polly? Claire's got room! I'll just find a little corner into which to bunker down. Good night!

He flees up the stairs. John looks at Claire, abashedly.

John: Sorry about him.

Claire: I know. It's like you can't even lure a man to the Alps anymore without being called a fiendish manipulator.

John: I know! I mean, he drags me all over god's half-acre and expects me to wait on him hand and penis. God, I wish he knew how it felt to be shunned so... (*Lightbulb*) You know, perhaps we ought to teach him a lesson.

Claire: Yeah... *Let's beat him up in his sleep!*

John: Um.

Mary and Percy return, dragging the futon.

Mary: Here we go! A little on the small side, but should be comfy— Where's LB?

Claire: He went upstairs to find somewhere to sleep.

Mary: But it's only our bedroom up there—

Upstairs, a door slams and locks.

Mary: Of course.

John: Well, Claire, you mentioned that *you* had room for two Oh she's gone.

A second door closes. John and the Shelleys look at one another, and then at the single futon, and then back at one another. John smiles and shrugs.