

## Characters

Mary Brotherton	–	An heiress <b>(F)</b>
Lady Clarissa Shrimpton	–	Daughter of an earl <b>(F)</b>
Dr Crockley	–	Friend to Sir Matthew Dowling <b>(M)</b>
Sir Matthew Dowling	–	Wealthy owner of Brookford Mill <b>(M)</b>
Lady Dowling	–	Sir Matthew's wife <b>(F)</b>
Mr Parsons	–	Superintendent at Brookford Mill <b>(M)</b>
Peggy	–	A maid <b>(F)</b>
Osmond Norval	–	A poet <b>(M)</b>
Mrs Gabberly	–	A gossip <b>(F)</b>
Jenkins	–	A manservant <b>(M)</b>
Mrs Tremlett	–	Mary Brotherton's old nurse <b>(F)</b>
Mr Woodcomb	–	Superintendent at Deep Valley Mill <b>(M)</b>
George Bell	–	Parson at Fairly <b>(M)</b>
Mrs Bell	–	His wife <b>(F)</b>
Richard Oastler	–	Campaigner for Factory Reform <b>(M)</b>
Richard Smithson	–	Once coachman to Mary Brotherton <b>(M)</b>
Betty	–	A housekeeper <b>(F)</b>
Mrs Armstrong	–	Michael's mother <b>(F)</b>
Martha Dowling	–	Sir Matthew's youngest daughter aged thirteen <b>(F)</b>
Martha Dowling	–	Aged twenty three <b>(F)</b>
Michael Armstrong	–	A factory boy aged nine <b>(M)</b>
Michael Armstrong	–	Aged nineteen <b>(M)</b>
Edward Armstrong	–	Michael's lame brother aged eleven <b>(M)</b>
Edward Armstrong	–	Aged twenty-one <b>(M)</b>
Fanny Fletcher	–	A factory girl aged eleven <b>(F)</b>
Fanny Fletcher	–	Aged twenty-one <b>(F)</b>
Guests at Dowling Lodge		<b>(M/F)</b>
Pantomime Cow		<b>(M/F)</b>
Factory Children		<b>(M/F)</b>

## Act 1

### Scene 1 – A country lane

(Tabs open. Lights up. A lane in the country close to Dowling Lodge in the early evening of Summer 1822. There are entrances stage left and stage right. There is a stile US left. Mary Brotherton and Lady Clarissa Shrimpton enter right and move DS left while speaking. SFX. birdsong)

**Mary:** Such a delightful idea of yours to come out, Lady Clarissa. It is the only thing in the world to do on such an evening as this.

**Lady Clarissa:** My dear Miss Brotherton, I'm sure we must both have been half stifled in there.

(Lady Dowling, Sir Matthew Dowling and Dr Crockley enter right and stop DS centre)

**Crockley:** A most excellent dinner, Sir Matthew. And such fine company.

**Sir Matthew:** Thank you, Doctor. I am, as you well know, devoted to everything intellectual, but occasionally I allow myself to relish the lighter embellishments of society.

**Crockley:** Indeed so. God knows, I would not wish to spoil the enjoyment of this delightful hour, Sir Matthew, but I don't like this business at the Weavers' Arms.

**Sir Matthew:** What business, Doctor?

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**Crockley:** Why, the meeting of the people who work in your factory which is to be held this evening. I don't like it, Sir Matthew, and I can't get the notion of a strike out of my head.

**Sir Matthew:** A strike!

**Crockley:** I believe it is as well for you to be on the lookout. But you are such a good, generous, gentleman that I dare say we shall soon hear that you have done some good natured thing that perhaps will set it all right.

**Sir Matthew:** (Thoughtfully) Yes, indeed. Thank you Doctor.

**Lady Dowling:** We must return soon, Sir Matthew, there is a chill in the air and Miss Brotherton may catch her death.

**Lady Clarissa:** I should like to stay a little longer, wouldn't you, Sir Matthew?

**Sir Matthew:** Well, I, of course your ladyship.

**Lady Dowling:** We shall return, then, and leave you to your discussion.

**(Lady Dowling, Mary Brotherton and Dr Crockley exit right. Sir Matthew moves to DS centre. SFX. birdsong fades)**

**Lady Clarissa:** Sir Matthew, have you heard of the gifted young writer, Osmund Norval, and have you yet seen him?

**Sir Matthew:** I have heard a good deal about him, my lady, but I determined to have nothing to say to him till I had had the benefit of your valuable opinion.

**Lady Clarissa:** How flattering, Sir Matthew. So will you let me introduce him to you?

**Sir Matthew:** My lady, how can I say no?

**Lady Clarissa:** You are too kind a thousand times. I shall bring him tomorrow. As I was walking through your magnificent gardens earlier, dear Sir Matthew, one of Mr Norval's stanzas came into my mind (**recites**) Now fire my cheek, now turn it livid, should that soft eye but drop one tear, I'd hug my chain, and call it dear! You feel it, dear Sir Matthew. I'd hug my chain and call it dear.

**(Lady Clarissa clings to Sir Matthew's arm)**

**Sir Matthew:** Let us turn back, my lady.

**Lady Clarissa:** My dear friend, I am sure you too are strongly moved. It is far better for both of us that we should proceed. Come, Sir Matthew, this soft glade invites us.

**(SFX. cow moos offstage left)**

**Sir Matthew:** (**Looking stage left**) Good heaven! There is that horrid spotted cow! The worst beast in the whole parish! And that dog belonging to the farmer has arrived. Turn back, dearest Lady Clarissa. Turn back instantly!

**(Sir Matthew and Lady Clarissa move right. SFX. Cow moos and dog barks offstage left. As the sounds continue Lady Clarissa clings to Sir Matthew and screams)**

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**Lady Clarissa:** Go away! Go away you beast!

**(Michael and Edward Armstrong enter by climbing over the stile USL. They look first at Sir Matthew and then offstage left before walking towards stage right. SFX. Dog barking and the mooing continue)**

**Sir Matthew:** Come here, you young scamps. Don't you see what's going on? Now drive back that devil of a beast.

**(Edward limps back to the stile and sits down. Michael turns to face offstage left, takes off his hat and waves both arms)**

**Michael:** Whoah! Whoah!

**(SFX. mooing and barking stop. Sound of cow walking away offstage left)**

**Sir Matthew:** **(Moving right)** Let me lead you home, my dear lady.

**Lady Clarissa:** **(Breathless)** Not till I have thanked my little deliverer, Sir Matthew. What can I do to reward the astonishing bravery of that noble little fellow?

**Sir Matthew:** He will be delighted if you give him sixpence.

**Lady Clarissa:** Sixpence! Oh, Sir Matthew, how you love a jest. This heroic child shall receive the reward he has earned. And if you value me, Sir Matthew, as much as I think you do, this little boy will be clothed, educated, fed and lodged by you. Will not the daily sight of him give you pleasure by renewing the memory of this evening?

**Sir Matthew:** **(Looking uncomfortable but raising a weak smile)** Clothed, educated, fed and lodged? **(pause)** Of course Lady Clarissa. Come here, my boy.

**(Michael walks slowly towards them. Edward dozes off on the stile)**

**Lady Clarissa:** You are a brave little fellow and as your reward you shall be comfortably clothed and fed for the rest of your life. You will like that, won't you?

**Michael:** I should very much like never to go to work at the factory any more, ma'am.

**Lady Clarissa:** And what is your name?

**Michael:** Michael Armstrong.

**Lady Clarissa:** And how old are you?

**Michael:** Nine last birthday.

**Lady Clarissa:** Michael Armstrong. I shall not forget it, I assure you. For truly do I believe that I should have been trampled in the dust if you had not been heart-strong, as well as arm-strong. **(Sir Matthew gives a polite laugh)**

**Michael:** Please ma'am. May I go and tell Teddy?

**Lady Clarissa:** Teddy? Who is Teddy my little man?

**Michael:** **(Pointing to Edward who is asleep on the stile)** Teddy is my brother, please ma'am. He can't stand very well because he is lame.

**Lady Clarissa:** Well, then, just bid him run along home and tell all the family what a fine act you have done, and that Sir Matthew Dowling is going to take care of you all the rest of your life.

**(Sir Matthew gapes in astonishment)**

**Michael:** What, mother and all?

**Lady Clarissa:** Yes, I should think so, my dear.

**Sir Matthew:** Well, erm, yes, it is quite true, my boy. Wholly because of my devoted friendship to this charming lady I will undertake to provide for you all.

**Lady Clarissa:** Let me talk to your brother

**(Michael goes to Edward, wakes him up and they both walk back to Lady Clarissa)**

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**Lady Clarissa:** And what is your name, my pretty boy?

**Edward:** Edward Armstrong, ma'am.

**Lady Clarissa:** What makes you sleepy, my dear. Have you been at play?

**Edward:** No, ma'am, I have been at work.

**Lady Clarissa:** At work. You can't have done much work looking as you do.

**Edward:** I have been at work since five this morning, ma'am

**Lady Clarissa:** Five! This morning!

**Sir Matthew:** My dear Lady Clarissa, I really will not let you stay another moment. The heat has gone and I'm sure you will get quite chilled if you remain any longer.

**Lady Clarissa:** I believe you are right, my dear friend **(to Edward)** Go home, little Edward, and tell your mother that your brother is rewarded for an act of bravery that probably saved the life of an earl's daughter, and that he has most generously been adopted by Sir Matthew Dowling. **(To Michael)** Come along little one. Follow behind us and see the palace of a home which your bravery has won.

**(Lady Clarissa, Sir Matthew, Michael exit right. Edward limps off left. Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

**Scene 2 –Dowling Lodge drawing room**

**(Tabs open. Lights rise. It is the following morning. There are entrances left and right. There is a sofa right, two comfortable chairs left, and an ottoman bench upstage. Sir Matthew is seated on the sofa. Parsons enters right.)**

**Sir Matthew:** Ah, good morning, Parsons. Tell me what you have heard about the meeting at the Weavers' Arms last night. Sit down, man, and let us hear all about it.

**(Sir Matthew indicates one of the chairs and Parsons sits down)**

**Parsons:** I suspect there's mischief brewing, Sir Matthew. Our people have taken dudgeon about that girl Stephens that died last week just after leaving the mill. She had been at work all day and who was to guess she was that low?

**Sir Matthew:** That was a damned stupid thing, though, Parsons, to have a girl go on working and not know that she was dying.

**Parsons:** And how is one to know, sir? I'll defy any man to find out, what with all their tricks and carrying on, whether she was dying or not.

**Sir Matthew:** Good point, Parsons. Yes, I can see that. However it is quite plain that people have got some mischief into their cursed heads and this must be prevented. 'Tis the rousing of people's attention, Parsons, that's the danger. And where will the wealth of our nation be if those rascals contrive to stop the mills instead of working them?

**Parsons:** Lord have mercy on us, Sir Matthew, if you don't make me creep all over when I hear that.

**Sir Matthew:** I shall surprise you, perhaps, Mr Parsons, when I tell you what I am about now. It came by accident at first, but I'll make a capital thing out of it before I am done. What is required Parsons, is to give people something to talk about besides this confounded girl's death.

**Parsons:** I don't quite understand you, sir.

**Sir Matthew:** No, I daresay you don't. What do you say, Mr Superintendent, to my taking a dirty little dog of a piecer out of the factory into my own house, dressing him, feeding him and lodging him all for the love of pure benevolence? Will that not cause people to wonder at the kind hearted nature of their benefactor?

**Parsons:** Might I say, Sir Matthew, that if you set your mind to it, then it will surely be.

**Sir Matthew:** Well spoken, Parsons. And now my good fellow, tell me all you know of a boy called Michael Armstrong for he, you understand, is the hero of my tale.

**Parsons:** That's the boy is it? So that's why he didn't come to work this morning. I knows him well enough, Sir Matthew, of course.

**Sir Matthew:** Are the parents living?

**Parsons:** The mother is. She's bedridden and ought to be in the workhouse.

**Sir Matthew:** No, Parsons, no! That woman must not go to the workhouse. She must be persuaded to give her consent to her son's new privileges. **(Pause)** What d'ye say now to having the woman about to be arrested for debt or having her things sold off, and then we arrive at the very nick of time and save her so she will be forever beholden to us?

**Parsons:** A clever idea, Sir Matthew, if I may say so.

**Sir Matthew:** **(Standing up)** You certainly may. Good man, Parsons. Now then be off and contrive some scheme or other to throw the unhappy family into a quandary, from which we shall bring about their rescue.

**Parsons:** I understand you perfectly, sir

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**(They both laugh as Parsons exits right Lady Dowling enters right followed by Martha Dowling and Michael, dressed in fine clothes. Sir Matthew remains standing until Lady Dowling sits in one of the chairs left and he and Martha sit on the sofa. Michael stands right)**

**Sir Matthew:** My dear Lady Dowling, I must ask for your benevolence in favour of this unhappy boy who yesterday showed extreme bravery in favour of Lady Clarissa Shrimpton and myself by seeing off a dangerous beast of a cow.

**Lady Dowling:** **(Raising her eyebrows in astonishment and giving first Sir Matthew and then Michael a suspicious look)** I should like to know where he got those clothes from.

**Sir Matthew:** My dearest love. That is entirely my own doing. You have known me long enough, my sweetest, to know that I never do anything by halves. I saw that little fellow ragged and wretched and I clothed him.

**Lady Dowling:** Well, I must say, I do think –

**(SFX. Front door bell)**

**Sir Matthew:** **(Raising his voice)** I saw him ragged and I clothed him, my dear.

**(Peggy enters right)**

**Peggy:** Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, Mrs Gabberley, Miss Mary Brotherton and Mr Osmond Norval, Sir Matthew.

**(Lady Clarissa, Mrs Gabberly, Mary and Norval enter right)**

**Sir Matthew:** Lady Clarissa, Mrs Gabberly, Miss Brotherton.

**Lady Clarissa:** You guess why I am here, do you not Sir Matthew? Permit me to present this young remarkable person who, in my judgement, may fairly claim competition with the finest poets of the age. Mr Osmond Norval.

**Sir Matthew:** (**Vigorously placing both hands around Norval's right hand**) Mr Norval, as one honoured by the patronage of Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, I shall hold you as one of my most esteemed friends.

**Norval:** It is an honour to meet you, sir.

**Lady Dowling:** (**Agitated by her husband's remarks**) Might it not be more pleasant now to be seated?

(**Sir Matthew leads Lady Clarissa to one chair, Lady Dowling resumes her seat on the other chair. Mrs Gabberly and Mary sit on the sofa. Martha sits on the Ottoman bench and Michael stands beside her. Sir Matthew and Norval remain standing.**)

**Sir Matthew:** (**Indicating Michael**) Lady Clarissa, please behold the factory boy!

**Lady Clarissa:** (**Looking Michael up and down**) Indeed, indeed. This is a noble act, Sir Matthew. Osmand Norval, let not this beautiful subject escape you. Look at the air of aristocratic refinement which has replaced the sordid wretchedness I once beheld. Look at this interesting fellow, Mrs Gabberly, for it is he who is the hero of the hour.

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well now. And, pray, what may the young gentleman's name be?

**Lady Clarissa:** Is that not delicious, Sir Matthew? This young gentleman, as you most naturally call him, Mrs Gabberly, was a few short hours ago a wretched, ragged, beggar-boy. And would you know the hand that wrought this wondrous change? (**She indicates Sir Matthew**) Why, behold him here! This is an act that ought to be given fame and, if Sir Matthew does not object to it, I suggest its being recorded by Mr Norval's pen, and given a wider circulation.

(**Mary looks amazed**)

**Norval:** Such a subject, oh heaven. And at your bidding too, dearest Lady Clarissa. All my power and strength will be put in the writing of it. But, may I humbly ask, is it to be published by subscription?

**Lady Clarissa:** (**Clapping her hands together**) I have got it ! Oh, I have got it. What a delicious idea. All of you, listen to what I am going to say. It shall live in story, it shall live in song, it shall live in action. (**She pauses**) Norval, dear gifted friend, did you ever write a drama?

**Norval:** Occasionally, a scene or two, Lady Clarissa.

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**Lady Clarissa:** That is enough, dear Osmond. I will relate to him, Sir Matthew, the interesting anecdote exactly as it occurred last evening, and he shall dramatise it and we will act in it. And all the neighbourhood shall be assembled to enjoy it. What do you say, Sir Matthew?

**Sir Matthew:** Upon my word, my lady, I think it is one of the cleverest and most agreeable ideas. I shall have one of the rooms fitted up as a theatre.

**Lady Clarissa:** Will it not be pleasant, Miss Brotherton?

**Mary:** **(Looking hard at Michael)** Very pleasant indeed, Lady Clarissa.

**Lady Clarissa:** Mrs Gabberly?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well now, Lady Clarissa, I have never heard anything so delightful as that! Will cards be sent out, Sir Matthew?

**Sir Matthew:** Depend on it, Mrs Gabberly, that when they are, you will not be forgotten.

**Lady Clarissa:** And what does my Lady Dowling say?

**Lady Dowling:** Oh, dear me. I am sure I don't know.

**Lady Clarissa:** Well we must not torment Lady Dowling by forcing her to act, Sir Matthew. There cannot be any doubt we shall have volunteers in abundance.

**Sir Matthew:** Come, ladies and gentlemen, let us discuss the matter further over dinner.

**(Lady Clarissa, Norval, Mary, Mrs Gabberly, Lady Dowling, exit left. As they are leaving Sir Matthew turns to Michael)**

**Sir Matthew:** My dear little fellow. Go home now to your mother and brother. Martha, take the boy to the kitchen and find a basket to take home with him.

**(Sir Matthew exits left. Martha and Michael exit right. Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

### Scene 3 – Dowling Lodge hallway

**(Hallway at Dowling Lodge immediately following. Entrances left and right. Martha and Michael enter left, front of tabs.)**

- Michael:** Is Sir Matthew Dowling, as owns our factory, your father, ma'am?
- Martha:** Yes, Michael, he is. Tell me something about the mill. Papa has never let us see it yet because mamma thinks it is a dirty place. Is it very dirty, Michael?
- Michael:** Yes, ma'am
- Martha:** But what makes me curious, Michael, is what little creatures like you can do there.
- Michael:** I am a piecer, ma'am.
- Martha:** And what does that mean, pray?
- Michael:** I work on the billy and watch out for broken threads. When I sees one I have to reach over the machine, piece the two ends together and wind them back round the spindle before the wheel comes back and hits me.
- Martha:** Papa says that he pays a vast quantity of money to quite little children and that's the reason why factories are such a blessing to the country. You get wages don't you, my little fellow?
- Michael:** Yes, ma'am, I get six shillings a month.
- Martha:** That is not much to be sure, but it's better than nothing isn't it?

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- Michael:** Yes, ma'am
- Martha:** And do the children like it?
- Michael:** Like what ma'am?
- Martha:** Working in the factory, my dear, and getting money for their poor parents.
- Michael:** The children likes to have the wages.
- Martha:** But don't you think it right for poor people's children to do something to help themselves if they can.
- Michael:** Yes, ma'am. Shall we go to mother and Teddy if you please ma'am?
- Martha:** Of course, Michael. I shall fill a basket for you right up to the top.

**(Martha and Michael exit right)**

**Scene 4 – Dowling Lodge drawing room**

**(It is one month later. The room is prepared for the staging of the play. There are entrances left and right. The ‘stage’ is set USL facing DSL marked by a pillar either side. Rows of chairs are set out right facing the ‘stage’. Sir Matthew and Parsons enter left.)**

**Sir Matthew:** Now, Parsons, did you call upon the widow Armstrong as we discussed?

**Parsons:** I did indeed, Sir Matthew, having first arranged with Master Butchell, the parish overseer, and Master Larkin, the baker, the hour when they would call upon her. When the time came I ensconced myself by an open window of her house where I could hear all that was said. Master Butchell informed the widow that the parish would no longer be allowing her the two shillings a week she had been receiving and then Master Larkins entered with a demand for three pounds, two shillings and seven pence that was owed. Upon hearing this the widow could not respond and began to weep bitterly. I decided that this was my time and I entered the room and announced that you, Sir Matthew, intended to befriend the woman and offer full settlement on account of your charitable nature and protection of the widow’s boy.

**Sir Matthew:** Excellent work, Parsons, and what was the widow’s response?

**Parsons:** She asked, Sir Matthew, what you required of her and her son for your favour, and I replied that you wished to make him a gentleman.

**Sir Matthew:** Indeed so. Well done, Parsons. You may attend to your duties now. We are soon to begin the performance of Mr Norval’s play.

**(Parsons exits right)**

**Sir Matthew:** Ha!

**(Sir Matthew exits left. Mary Brotherton and Peggy enter right)**

**Peggy:** I will inform Miss Martha that you are here, ma’am.

**(Peggy exits left. Mary examines the ‘stage’ until Martha enters left)**

**Martha:** How pleasant to see you, Miss Brotherton.

**Mary:** This is very kind of you to see me, Miss Martha. I hope I have not hurried you. Will you be taking part in the play today?

**Martha:** I? Take part? Oh no Miss Brotherton. What should I make of acting?

**Mary:** I think you are very right, Martha. Tell me what you know of this drama. It is about the boy your father has been so kind to, I understand.

**Martha:** So I believe, but I don't know much about it myself.

**Mary:** What sort of little boy is he?

**Martha:** A very nice fellow indeed, and I think if I had been papa I should have done the same thing myself.

**Mary:** Have you talked to him much?

**Martha:** Yes, a good deal. He has been very occupied in learning his part in the play because he can hardly read at all. So I have been trying to help him.

**Mary:** What of his own life at home?

**Martha:** He appears very fond of his mother and brother and he cares for nothing unless he can take something to them

**Mary:** And does your papa let him do so?

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**Martha:** Oh yes, every day.

**Mary:** Then I suppose the little fellow is superlatively happy?

**Martha:** **(Pause)** I'm sure I don't know.

**Sir Matthew:** **(Offstage)** Ladies and gentlemen, be pleased to enter the theatre where the amusement is about to commence.

**Mary:** Don't forsake me, dear Martha. I do not think I shall enjoy this unless I am seated next to you.

**(Martha looks surprised. They sit in the second row DS. Lady Dowling, Mrs Gabberly, Dr Crockley, Peggy and other guests enter right and fill the remaining seats. Norval enters left and stands on the stage. The audience applaud.)**

**Norval:** **(Recites)** Open your ears, for which of you will stop  
The seat of learning, when loud rumour speaks?  
I, from the orient to the drooping west  
Making the wind my post-horse will unfold  
The act performed by virtuous Dowling here  
And this noble lady saved from mortal fear.

**(Sir Matthew and Lady Clarissa enter left onto the stage, to applause. Norval exits left. A pantomime cow enters left onto the stage and moos)**

**Lady Clarissa:** **(Recites)** Were I alone I might tremble here  
But with a protector such as you, Sir,  
I shall not fear what is to come.

**Sir Matthew:** **(Recites)** Yet this beast with crumpled horn is strong  
That I must urge retreat from here ere long  
Unless a hero can be found  
And, lo, he comes to stand his ground.

**(Michael enters left and jumps onto stage waving his arms. The cow turns and exits left)**

**Michael:** **(Recites)** The beast is gone!

**(The 'audience' applauds)**

**Sir Matthew:** **(Recites)** Permit me, madam, to express my joy  
That you have been saved by this good little boy.  
And as reward for courage he has shown  
I shall take him home as though he were my own.

**Lady Clarissa:** **(Recites)** Dear little boy, this new life for you  
Will give your mother joy and brother too.  
Sir Matthew is so very kind  
To do good is all he seeks to find.

**(Michael turns to face DS in some distress)**

**Michael:** **(Recites)** My mother's dear **(Pause)** and so's my brother too  
But dearer still are **(Pause)** Sir Matthew and you  
His charity's so great, his heart so good  
He gives the naked clothes, the hungry food  
And I for one **(Pause)** will day and night in prayer  
Ask blessings for **(Pause)** him and **(Pause)** his worth declare

**(Michael runs off left in tears. Norval enters left onto the stage looking worried. Sir Matthew looks angry. Lady Clarissa looks bewildered. The 'audience' applaud briefly. Norval indicates the exit and Sir Matthew and Lady Clarissa exit left. Norval bows and exits left. The 'audience' exit right in silence. Mary and Martha remain seated.)**

**Mary:** Is all that weeping a part of Mr Norval's drama do you think?

**Martha:** Upon my word I don't know. But I think not.

**Mary:** Then that child is suffering.

**Martha:** I should hope he is not.

**Mary:** Does your father love the little boy?

**Martha:** He is very kind to him.

**Sir Matthew:** **(Offstage, loudly)** Blackguard! Devil's Imp!

**Martha:** **(Standing)** Let us go back, pray let us go back.

**Mary:** Let me sit here for a few minutes my dear Miss Martha

**Sir Matthew:** **(Offstage, loudly)** Will you believe it, Crockley? That little vermin did it on purpose. Was there anything there to make him cry? Hadn't I fed him and clothed him? Didn't I provide his lazy mother with such niceties as the dirty beggar never heard of before? And his crook-shanked rat of a brother too. And now to see that black-hearted traitor come upon the stage and cry before all the company as if his heart was breaking? By the living God, I am sick of the job! He shall go back, Crockley, upon my soul he shall. Back into the factory tomorrow morning. It's the only way to prevent his driving me mad. I loathe the very sight of him

**Mary:** Monster!

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**(Martha falls to the ground in a faint. Mary kneels and raises Martha's head slapping her cheeks gently. Martha comes round and Mary helps her onto a chair.)**

**Mary:** My dearest Martha, fear not that I should ever repeat what I have so accidentally heard. And do not let your good nature suffer because I have heard it. Let us slip out to the fresh air for indeed this room is too hot.

**(Mary helps Martha up and holds her arm as they exit right. Tabs close. Lights off.)**

**Scene 5 – Dowling Lodge hallway**

**(Entrances left and right. Sir Matthew enters and paces up and down. Dr Crockley enters and stands stage right)**

**Sir Matthew:** I must give it up, Crockley. I must, upon my soul.

**Crockley;** That's fair enough, Sir Matthew, you must do as you like. But the story of your good deed towards the boy is doing wonders everywhere, to count against the grumblings over Nancy Stephens sudden demise.

**Sir Matthew:** That's true, devilish true, and yet it is no cure for my being sick to the stomach every time I see him. The long and the short of it is, I don't think I shall be able to keep my hands off him for very much longer before he pushes me too far and I strike out. I don't think my act of charity would do much good then, doctor.

**Crockley;** It is a bore, Sir Matthew to be sure. Is there no getting rid of the boy? No possibility of sending him as 'prentice somewhere or other?

**Sir Matthew:** 'Prentice? 'Prentice! Send him as 'prentice!

**(Sir Matthew walks over to Crockley with hand outstretched. They shake hands.)**

**Sir Matthew:** Upon my soul, Crockley, if you had laid down five hundred pounds I should not have considered it worth even half as much as that one word.. Yes, by Jove, he shall be 'prentice.

**Crockley;** Will that be at Brookford, Sir Matthew?

**Sir Matthew:** Brookford? Oh no, that is far too close to home. I have in mind an altogether more suitable establishment, the Deep Valley Mill.

**Crockley;** I don't think I know it

**Sir Matthew:** I am sure you do not. Deep Valley is the property of my excellent friend, Elgood Sharpton, a fine dauntless character and one of the men born to be the making of this country. He has hit on the most perfect scheme that ever entered a man's head for finding good, cheap labour.

**Crockley;** And what might that be?

**Sir Matthew:** Well, there are lots of parishes in England that don't know what to do with their pauper brats. So he goes to them and tells them that the best way to do their duty by the parish children, particularly the orphans, is to apprentice them to a good trade. So many parishes feel convinced by this that Elgood Sharpton had soon got Deep Valley as full of young hands as he could cram. Now, you have heard that old Sir Robert Peel took it into his head that children should not be overworked, but it is easy to keep the creatures ignorant about that. They must either do what the master tells them or starve. And Deep Valley is built in a wild, desolate spot where I don't believe the sun ever shines, so the chances are about ten thousand to one against any

meddlers into matters that don't concern them ever catching sight of it. And if a complaint is made to our friends among the magistrates, they can be managed. But the problem, it strikes me, is that I might have some difficulty making the brat's mother consent to it.

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**Crockley;** Surely not, Sir Matthew. All you have to do is to carry on sending tit-bits to the sick woman and the rickety boy you mentioned, and she'll not choose to affront her generous benefactor.

**Sir Matthew:** Yes, I daresay you are right, doctor. I shall go to the widow myself and I shall take Miss Martha with me. Then I shall bear the sight of the brat better knowing that he will soon be on his way to Deep Valley.

**(Crockley and Sir Matthew exit. Lights off)**



## Act 2

### Scene 1 – Milton Park writing room.

(Tabs open. Lights up. Milton Park is the home of Mary Brotherton. Scene is set the following day. There is an entrance right. There are three easy chairs centre and a writing desk US left with chair facing the wall where a bell-rope hangs. Mary is seated at the desk writing. Mrs Gabberly enters right unannounced.)

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well now my dear child, how are you today?

(Mary looks up and turns to face her)

**Mrs Gabberly:** Upon my word Mary, you are too pale. You know, my dear, the pallor, as we call it, is not natural to your complexion and therefore must be attended to. Have you any camphor in the house, dear?

**Mary:** Thank you, Mrs Gabberly but I want nothing of the kind.

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well now, then I must think of something else. But that was not the point I came to talk about. Do you know, my dear, I can't sleep at nights for thinking about the impossibility of your living on since your dear mother passed away, all by yourself in this great palace of a house. Nobody to drink your health. Nobody to say, isn't this nice. Nobody to give you a smile when you look up.

(Mary turns her head away to face DS)

**Mrs Gabberly:** I have been thinking, my dear, that what you must do is to find amongst your friends and acquaintances, some respectable gentlewoman to live with you. Somebody already known in the neighbourhood would be the most desirable because then you would not have the trouble of introducing her. And it will not be proper for so young a person as you to visit people, even in the country, without a proper chaperone. (She waits for a response but Mary continues face DS) Well now, my dear Mary, what do you think about it?

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**Mary:** (Standing up and facing Mrs Gabberly) You have described my situation so forcibly, Mrs Gabberly, that I do indeed consider it desirable to make some arrangement that may better it. But I will not do this without reflection. Leave me now. I thank you for your kind concern, and when you next call upon me you shall find that what you have said has not been disregarded.

**Mrs Gabberly:** That's very sensible, my dear child. God forbid, my dear that I should make you do anything in a hurry. Only you must not forget that everybody will be on the look out to observe what you do and they won't wait before making their remarks, that's all. Well now, I'll go directly. God bless you, dearest.

**(Mrs Gabberly embraces Mary and then exits right. Mary sits in one of the chairs for a while then gets up and pulls the bell-rope. SFX. bell. She sits down at the desk. Jenkins enters right.)**

**Mary:** Do you know whether Mrs Tremlett is in the cottage today, Jenkins?

**Jenkins:** I believe so ma'am.

**Mary:** Tell her to be so kind as to come to me immediately.

**(Jenkins exits right. Mary begins to write at her desk. Mrs Tremlett enters right.)**

**Mary:** **(Turning to face Mrs Tremlett)** Come in dear nurse and sit down, please.

**(Mrs Tremlett sits in the chair closest to Mary.)**

**Mrs Tremlett:** What's the matter, my child? You do not look yourself today.

**Mary:** I have been bored and plagued, nurse Tremlett, and now I am going to bore and plague you. I know you won't like it, but I am asking you to lead a new life altogether.

**Mrs Tremlett:** Oh goodness Miss Mary, what is it you mean? You are not going to send me away are you?

**Mary:** **(Touching Mrs Tremlett on the arm and smiling)** No, nurse Tremlett, you need not be afraid of that. Mrs Gabberly has been here and she tells me I must immediately take some elderly lady into the house to sit with me and take care of me because, she says, I am too young to live alone.

**Mrs Tremlett:** Well, my dear, I dare say she speaks the truth. Your great fortune and prettiness will certainly bring many an eye upon you.

**Mary:** But the worst of it is that I believe Mrs Gabberly has made up her mind to come and live here as my companion herself.

**Mrs Tremlett:** And, by your manner I think you would not like that. But don't fret yourself. You must simply make some civil excuse to Mrs Gabberly. You are clever enough to find one I daresay.

**Mary:** Yes, nurse Tremlett I am. I think, in fact, I have found one already.

**Mrs Tremlett:** And what shall you say to her, my dear?

**Mary:** I shall tell her that you are going to live with me as my companion.

**Mrs Tremlett:** Nonsense dear. This is a joke surely?

**Mary:** Mrs Tremlett, I am not jesting in any way. You have nursed me as a child, you have looked out for me since and you know my ways. If you can do what I desire, Mrs Tremlett, you will save me from having to spend my life with a person whose very presence is a pain to me. **(She pauses)** Dear nurse, you will not forsake me then?

**Mrs Tremlett:** **(Smiling and touching Mary's arm)** Do what you will with me, my dear. You shall have your own way.

**Mary:** You are indeed a kind soul, and you will henceforth be my nurse no longer, but my most dear, dear friend.

**(They sit in silence for a moment.)**

**Mary:** Pray, Mrs Tremlett, there is a question that has vexed me lately. Do you know anything about the factory children who work in all the great ugly buildings around Ashleigh?

**Mrs Tremlett:** I know very little about them, Miss Mary, no more than you do, I believe.

**Mary:** I was at a rather disturbing theatrical at Dowling Lodge yesterday at which Lady Clarissa remarked that the children who work in the factories are very different from those whose parents have worked for a dozen generations on the lands of the same family. Can you explain this difference to me? I do not understand it and I am quite certain it cannot be right.

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**Mrs Tremlett:** My dear child, it would hardly be decent to enter into all the reasons, but field labourers are just as likely to be good and virtuous as their betters, but it is altogether a different thing with the factory people. Of course, I have never been among them, but from what I hear the men are vicious and the women desolate, taking drams when they ought to buy food, and so horribly dirty and unthrifty. It is a common saying to only trust a factory girl as far as you can see her.

**Mary:** What a dreadful class, then, that these factory people have become. Is it not considered a great misfortune to the whole country?

**Mrs Tremlett:** As to that, my dear Mary, there's many will tell you that it is the finest thing in the world because these factories give employment to so many thousands of men, women and children. And that the whole system is a blessing to the country.

**Mary:** Then that account of it must surely be a very false one, nurse Tremlett.

**Mrs Tremlett:** I only say what I have heard, my dear. But if you will take an old servant's advice you will make up your mind neither to talk nor think any more on the subject. I'm sure it will give you no pleasure, and it does not seem possible to me that you can do any good. Will you decide, dear child, to think no more about it?

**Mary:** On the contrary, Mrs Tremlett, I am determined that for some time to come I will think of nothing else. I am determined, in fact, to obtain information upon this subject as speedily as possible. I shall therefore make a visit to the mother of that poor boy who Sir Matthew says he is protecting, but from what I overheard is behaving quite to the contrary. We shall visit that poor woman tomorrow, nurse Tremlett, to warn her of the danger that may come upon her son.

**(Lights off. Tabs Closed.)**

## Scene 2 – Mrs Armstrong’s dwelling

**(The scene is set in a humble dwelling. It is the following day. Tabs open. Lights rise. There is an entrance right with an old table and three wooden chairs centre. Mrs Armstrong is seated in a chair and Edward is kneeling next to her in great distress. Mary and Mrs Tremlett enter right and remain standing.)**

**Mary:** I beg your pardon, Mrs Armstrong, for breaking in upon you so abruptly. My name is Miss Brotherton and this is my companion, Mrs Tremlett. I fear our presence may have startled your sick child.

**Mrs Armstrong:** It is a long time since was in good health, ma’am, but it is not that which makes him so white and trembling. We have lost what was dearer to us both than all the world, and I can’t find a word in my heart to comfort him.

**Mary:** What, then, has happened? Nothing bad to your son, Michael, I hope?

**Mrs Armstrong:** You know Michael, ma’am?

**Mary:** I have seen him at Sir Matthew Dowling’s.

**Mrs Armstrong:** I wish you never had, ma’am. We were only starving before, but now we are worse than that.

**Mary:** What do you mean, Mrs Armstrong?

**Mrs Armstrong:** Sir Matthew Dowling, ma’am, has had him taken away.

**Mary:** **(Glancing anxiously towards Mrs Tremlett)** Please explain to me fully. I am greatly interested in your little boy.

**Mrs Armstrong:** I can tell you little that any friend of Sir Matthew Dowling would think important.

**Mary:** I am no particular friend of Sir Matthew’s, Mrs Armstrong.

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**Edward:** Then I will tell you about Michael. Did you see poor Mike when he was living there?

**Mary:** Yes, more than once, Edward, and I am quite sure he was not happy, even though he was dressed so fine.

**Edward:** He was unhappy ten times over.

**Mary:** Was he unkindly treated?

**Edward:** He was beaten, kicked and spat upon. And then he was told to laugh and look merry.

**Mary:** **(Glancing towards Mrs Tremlett)** A wretched sort of cruelty of which I quite believe Sir Matthew capable. But surely you do not think he has run away?

**Mrs Armstrong:** No, ma'am. He has been sent away to be 'prenticed. Sir Matthew himself with Miss Martha came yesterday to inform us and bade me sign the papers to bind him. And we do not know where he has been taken.

**Mary:** Yesterday? Sir Matthew and Miss Martha were here yesterday?

**Mrs Armstrong:** Yes ma'am

**Mary:** And did Martha Dowling counsel you to let him go?

**Mrs Armstrong:** Yes, again and again she did

**Mary:** Are you quite sure it was Miss Martha?

**Mrs Armstrong:** Oh yes, ma'am. Mike had brought her to me just a few days before.

**Mary:** Then you may be easy in your mind, Mrs Armstrong. I have no great liking for Sir Matthew Dowling, but if Miss Martha advised you to let Michael go, it was because she thought it would be advantageous to him.

**Mrs Armstrong:** Bless you for ever and ever ma'am. Do as I do, Edward, and look at the kind face of this young lady and find comfort in what she says.

**Mary:** Keep up your spirits, both of you, and tomorrow I shall call at Dowling Lodge tomorrow. Speak to Miss Martha and inquire about your boy's whereabouts. And for now, let your young fellow here look to me for his wages. I won't have him go to the factory any more. What was the amount of your wages by the month, Edward? **(Mary takes out her purse)**

**Edward:** Six shillings, ma'am.

**Mary:** Six shillings! And you have lost your health and liberty for that? **(She hands the money to Mrs Armstrong)** You shall go to the factory no more, master Edward. And you shall have six shillings each month from me, Mrs Armstrong.

**Mrs Armstrong:** Heaven keep you, ma'am.

**Mary:** God bless you both. You shall see me again.

**(Mary and Mrs Tremlett exit right. Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

### Scene 3 – Milton Park writing room

**(It is two days later. Tabs open to scene set in front of half-tabs. Lights up. Mary is seated in one of the easy chairs. Mrs Tremlett enters right.)**

**Mrs Tremlett:** Good morning, my dear Mary, and how was your visit to Dowling Lodge yesterday?

**Mary:** Oh, nurse Tremlett, I left in a most agitated state having obtained no information except that Sir Matthew would call or send message to me today. This letter arrived just a short time ago

**Mrs Tremlett:** And are its contents informative?

**Mary:** No, they are not. He advises me that the stocking weaver to whom Michael had been apprenticed has several factories and he does not know to which place the boy had been sent. What do you think of it, nurse?

**Mrs Tremlett:** Lord bless you, Miss Mary, I'm sure I don't know. But I don't see why you should put yourself into such a fuss.

**Mary:** Because, dear nurse, it remains my purpose to find where the boy has been taken as I promised his mother I would. I have therefore invited Mrs Gabberly to visit me this morning.

**Mrs Tremlett:** Mrs Gabberly, my dear?

**Mary:** Is she not the possessor of more gossip than any in this neighbourhood, nurse Tremlett? I intend to ascertain what she might have heard about the disappearance of Sir Matthew Dowling's protégé.

**(Jenkins enters right)**

**Jenkins:** Mrs Gabberly is in the hall, ma'am.

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**Mary:** Show her in, Jenkins.

**(Jenkins exits right. Mrs Gabberly enters right)**

**Mary:** Mrs Gabberly. How kind of you to call so soon. I hope you are well.

**Mrs Gabberly:** I am very well, my dear, and anxious to know whether you have resolved the matter we were discussing.

**Mary:** Yes, Mrs Gabberly, indeed I have. And Mrs Tremlett here has very kindly agreed to live here as my friend and companion.

**Mrs Gabberly:** (Looking disappointed) Mrs Tremlett?

**Mary:** A lady who has known me all my life and in whom I have the most absolute trust.

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well then, I am sure that will be satisfactory my dear child. Now tell me, my dear, what on earth kept you away from the Simmons' delightful picnic?

**Mary:** Perhaps I was afraid of catching cold, Mrs Gabberly. But will you make good my disappointment, by telling me all the news you heard there yesterday?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well now, will you believe it, two of the Simmons are going to be married, and Dr Crockley was exceedingly agreeable and attentive to me all day. And indeed so he was, I must say, to everybody. We do sometimes differ about spinal complaints, but it is impossible to deny that he can be very agreeable when he chooses it.

**Mary:** And Lady Clarissa was there, of course?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Of course, my dear. And such a flirtation with Sir Matthew. God knows, I ain't over strict in any way, but I must say I do think they carry things a little too far. Of course, a lady of rank and title like Lady Clarissa is not to be judged like common people, but nevertheless even an earl's daughter may get talked of.

**Mary:** And did Sir Matthew bring his little favourite with him? The little boy he has adopted?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Oh my dear! Haven't you heard? The little boy has been sent away with a monstrous premium paid by Sir Matthew to get him entered into one of the finest commercial houses in the land.

**Mary:** And did you happen to hear to what part of the country the boy had been sent, Mrs Gabberly?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Why, no my dear. I can't say I did. But that makes no difference, you know. Everybody is aware that it is a noble situation for the young fellow.

**Mary:** Oh, certainly. But I'm curious about things that nobody else seems to care about. Do you know, I am dying to get into a factory and see all those dear little children at work.

**Mrs Gabberly:** Why, good gracious my child, what a very queer notion.

**Mary:** But there can be no reason why I should not indulge it can there?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Nonsense my dear! There are a thousand reasons. Pray never let anybody in the neighbourhood hear you talk in this strange wild way. I am thinking, Mary, that somebody has been talking to you about all this. Like the romantic stuff about factory children that comes out of Fairly.

**Mary:** Fairly? And who is there at Fairly, dear Mrs Gabberly, who would be likely to talk to me on such a subject?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Why, that poor wrong-headed clergyman, George Bell?



**Mary:** And what is it he does that is so very wrong-headed?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Well now, you would hardly believe that a clergyman should actually encourage the poor to complain of the very labour by which they live. And yet, I give you my word, that is exactly what he has been doing.

**Mary:** Mr George Bell?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Yes my dear, that's the name of the foolish man who makes people fancy they are not well enough off .

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**Mary:** Fairly?

**Mrs Gabberly:** Yes, Mary, Fairly is where he lives, if I don't mistake. Oh my, I have got such a quantity of things I want to tell you but I can't stop one instant longer now even if you were to give me the whole world. So, goodbye to you my dear Mary. **(Without feeling)** Mrs Tremlett.

**(Mrs Gabberly exits right)**

**Mary:** Mrs Tremlett, I shall immediately send word to the Reverend Bell that I wish him to call upon me at his earliest convenience.

**(Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

#### Scene 4 – Deep Valley Mill

**(Scene is set behind half-tabs. Tabs and half tabs open. Lights up. There are entrances left and right and a large log sawn on two sides resting on the ground to form a table right. There are bowls and pieces of dry bread on the table. A group of children are sitting on the floor around the table drinking gruel from the bowls and chewing on the bread. Mr. Woodcomb enters left followed by Parsons and Michael)**

**Woodcomb:** So, this is the chap you are going to bestow upon us is it Mr Parsons? Has he nimble fingers?

**Parsons:** He can move ‘em quick enough when he’s got a mind to it. But you must not spare the strap for a more obstinate, hard-skinned little devil never crossed the threshold of a factory.

**Woodcomb:** Never mind, Mr Parsons, we know how to manage all those matters at Deep Valley, you may depend on it. Will you have a bite and a drop with us?

**Parsons:** No thank you, Mr Woodcomb. We’ve had a long journey here, and the roads are none of the best. So I must make my way back to the Crooked Billet tonight.

**Woodcomb:** Then our young master shall be handed over at once and I shall bid you farewell.

**(Parsons exits left. Woodcomb takes Michael to the table and sits him on the floor next to Fanny Fletcher, who is facing DS. Woodcomb exits right. When he has gone some of the children rest their arms on the table and sleep.)**

**Michael:** How old are you?

**Fanny:** Eleven years old three months ago.

**Michael:** Then you are more than one whole year older than me, and I dare say you know better than I do. My name is Michael. What’s your name?

**Fanny:** Fanny Fletcher and I will be kind to you if you’ll be a good boy and bear being in this place patiently.

**Michael:** I would bear it all the better if I knew when I was to get away. And when you was to get away too. Perhaps we are to stay here forever.

**Fanny:** That’s nonsense. They can’t keep us here forever. When we die we are sure to get away from them.

**Michael:** **(Starting to cry)** When we die? Are we to stay here till we die? Am I never to see Mother and Teddy any more then?

**Fanny:** Don’t cry, Michael. We shall be sure to get out if God thinks it right.

**Michael:** **(Stopping crying)** I wish I was as old as you, I should bear it better then. **(He puts a piece of bread in his mouth.)**

**Fanny:** There's a good boy. I will talk to you, Michael, whenever I can.

**(Michael spits out the bad bread)**

**Fanny:** It won't taste as nasty when you grow used to it. Did you hear about poor dear Betsy Price? I heard missis tell master that she was dead. Stricken by a fever. And I hear that others have been taken to the sick chamber too.

**Michael:** Then will we all be stricken, Fanny?

**Fanny:** If I was stricken and if I dies I shall be glad. I shall not be hungry in Heaven, Michael, nor will I work till ready to fall. God will give us green fields and sweet fresh air and flowers in Heaven, so why should I not be very glad?

**Michael:** I couldn't be glad if you was to die, Fanny.

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**Fanny:** **(Whispering)** Here he comes. We mustn't speak any more now.

**(Woodcomb enters right)**

**Woodcomb:** Off with you, vagabonds. To your beds now.

**(All exit right. Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

**Scene 5 – Milton Park writing room.**

**(Scene is set two days later front of half-tabs. Mary is seated in the left easy chair. Jenkins enters right.)**

**Jenkins:** A lady and gentleman are in the drawing room, ma'am.

**Mary:** I am expecting a gentleman alone, but show them in, Jenkins.

**(Jenkins exits right and returns with Mr and Mrs Bell.)**

**Mary** **(Stands and holds out her hand)** Mr Bell, how kind of you to come.

**Bell:** **(Shaking her hand)** Miss Brotherton, I wanted you to meet my wife too. We shall do well to hear this good woman, for she has probably more practical knowledge on the subject of the factory people than any other lady you could meet.

**Mary:** **(Shaking hands with Mrs Bell)** I am profoundly grateful you were able to accompany Mr Bell today, Mrs Bell. Do sit down.

**(Jenkins exits right. Mary sits in the left chair, Mrs Bell in the right chair and Mr Bell in the centre chair.)**

**Mary:** Let me first explain that I am in possession of a large fortune wholly amassed from the profits obtained by my father from the factories, and I cannot but feel an interest in the welfare of the children employed in the very same labour. I hope that you both will have the kindness to give me more accurate information on the subject than I have found it possible to obtain elsewhere.

**Bell:** Most willingly, Miss Brotherton. But please allow me to comment that your father's factory had a fine reputation in these parts for the welfare of its workers. You are, of course, aware that the young labourers of whom you have just spoken are calculated to amount to two hundred thousand in Yorkshire and Lancashire alone.

**Mary:** Is that possible? Alas, Mr Bell, I fear that until now I was not aware of the figures you speak of. But surely such a number forms a class that is entitled to English sympathy and protection?

**Bell:** There are no human beings in the whole world, the negro slaves included, who more urgently require the sympathy and protection of their fellow creatures.

**Mary:** But the negro slave, Mr Bell, has no choice, for he is the property of his master.

**Mrs Bell:** Neither has the factory child a choice, Miss Brotherton. He too is a property of the master. In the worst run factories he starts work at five in the morning and doesn't finish till nine or ten at night. On Saturday it could be eleven or twelve o'clock. The children stand at the machines all day and often have to climb under them to clear spindles, taking care they are not struck by them. And if any child works too slowly they are beaten by the overlooker, boys and girls alike. Many children grow up crippled by this and some have been known to die. To eat they are given breakfast, usually water-porridge with oatcake, brought to them while at their

workplace. Dinner is oatcake, either buttered or with treacle, and also eaten standing up. When work is finished in the evening they are given onion porridge and bread before they are sent to bed for a precious few hours sleep.

**Mary:** Can such things be, while the rulers of our land sit idly by?

**Mrs Bell:** Some individual voices have been raised, and an Act was approved by Parliament in 1819 which limited working hours and age of employment in the mills.

**Mary:** Then why do we still maintain such poor conditions?

**Bell:** No power was given for inspection of the factories, Miss Brotherton. There was nothing to induce a manufacturer to employ a more costly practice in preference to a cheaper one.

**Mary:** Is it proposed to abolish the use of machinery?

**Bell:** On the contrary, the use of machinery should be hailed as part and parcel of our magnificent birthright. All that we ask for, Miss Brotherton, is that it should be rendered illegal for men, women and children to be kept to the unhealthy labour of the mills for more than ten hours out of every day, and that their wages remain at the same rate as now.

**Mary:** And would that suffice to relieve the horrors you have been describing to me?

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**Mrs Bell:** We believe it would. I have not the slightest shadow of a doubt, Miss Brotherton, that much good would follow it.

**Mary:** There is a more local matter I wish to raise with you, Mr Bell, which concerns a young factory boy, Michael Armstrong, who was taken in by Sir Matthew Dowling but, we understand, has now been sent to another place the location of which we are unable to ascertain. The mother of this child suffers great anxiety about him and I have pledged myself to learn where he has been sent on her behalf. Can you, dear sir, suggest to me how this information can be obtained?

**Bell:** Sir Matthew Dowling is one of the most tyrannical of millocrats in the whole district, Miss Brotherton. If the little fellow had fallen under the rich knight's displeasure, it is my suspicion that he may have consigned him as apprentice to some establishment too notorious for its severity to be made known. But of this there seems neither proof nor likelihood.

**Mary:** Nay, I fear there is both truth and likelihood in such a suspicion. The boy met with Sir Matthew's considerable displeasure in my presence during the course of a theatrical at Dowling Lodge.

**Bell:** Then it must be looked into, Miss Brotherton, I know most of these wretched prison houses and I can willingly offer my services in applying for this information, but they know me too well for me to place confidence in their responses. If I knew where to find a trustworthy stranger who could not be recognised as a friend of mine, I think the chances of our finding the boy would greatly improve. But in truth I don't know where to look for such a person.

**Mary:** **(Pause)** Am I not such a one? Hardly anybody beyond the town of Ashleigh and its neighbourhood knows me personally.

**Bell:** But there are many factories to be visited, Miss Brotherton, and you are so young to undertake such an expedition. You must be accompanied.

**Mary:** I am older, I think, than you suppose, and if I undertake this task I shall be accompanied by my companion, Mrs Tremlett, and by no one else.

**Bell:** But how, my dear young lady, could you present yourself as interested in the inquiries you would have to make?

**Mary:** By merely stating that we are strangers who are desirous of seeing the factories, and are prepared to offer suitable incentives. Methinks I could carry out such an enterprise with a degree of diplomatic skill that would surprise you.

**Mrs Bell:** But surely you cannot travel without attendants, Miss Brotherton?

**Mary:** Do not judge me, Mrs Bell, Mr Bell, as a hot-headed girl anxious only to follow the whim of the moment. I now wish to employ my wealth in assisting the miserable race from whose labours it has been extracted. If you can aid me in this you will do me good, but you will do me none by pointing out the etiquettes by which the movements of young ladies are regulated.

**Bell:** Then I shall prepare for you, my good lady, the names of all the establishments within a distance of twenty miles which are notorious for taking apprentices. But to these, I must warn you, you will get no admission as a visitor.

**Mary;** I thank you, Mr Bell, such a list will be invaluable to me. Then, for the rest, we must trust to chance. And now, if you will allow me, I shall show you and Mrs Bell my pretty garden.

**(Mary, Mr Bell and Mrs Bell all stand and exit right. Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

## Scene 6 – Deep Valley Mill

**(The entrance hall at Deep Valley Mill. There are entrances left and right. Lights up. Mary and Mrs Tremlett enter left, front of tabs.)**

**Mrs Tremlett:** Oh Dear, Miss Mary. Have we many more visitations to make?

**Mary:** If you are unequal to this Mrs Tremlett, why didn't you tell me so when I explained my purpose before we set out? Did you think I was jesting in what I said to you?

**Mrs Tremlett:** No, not jesting, my dear. I just thought that after a little while with no success you might change your mind.

**Mary:** Do you not yet understand, nurse, how determined I am to persevere in this business?

**Mrs Tremlett:** I do understand, dearest Mary. I know that you will leave no stone unturned to obtain your objective. And I am quite ready, my dear, to persevere with you.

**Mary:** Thank you, nurse. I have great faith that this visit to Deep Valley today will lead us to Michael Armstrong.

**(Woodcomb enters right. SFX. factory machinery as ambient sound.)**

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**Woodcomb:** Good morning, ladies. I hope your journey was not too uncomfortable. The road to Deep Valley is not at all satisfactory. I can't stop the mills to march the young uns in all together, and so we hope it will be agreeable for you good ladies to look at 'em one or two at a time. Please be seated.

**(Tabs open. There are two adjacent chairs stage left. Woodcomb exits right. Mrs Tremlett sits in the US chair. Mary goes over to the entrance right and looks out.)**

**Mary:** What a multitude, Nurse Tremlett. It will take hours to see them all.

**(Mary sits in the DS chair and Child One and Two enter right.)**

**Mary:** Can you tell me if there is a boy here named Michael Armstrong?

**Child One:** I don't know ma'am.

**(Children One and Two exit right. Child Three enters right.)**

**Mary:** Hello dear. Have you seen a boy here named Michael Armstrong?

**Child Three:** No, ma'am.

**(Child Four and Five enter right.)**

**Mary:** Is there a boy here named Michael Armstrong?

**Child Five:** Not sure miss.

**(Child Four and Five exit right as the lights dim to denote the passing of time. SFX. Machinery fades out. As the lights come up, Fanny enters right, very slowly)**

**Mary:** Can you tell me if there's a boy here called Michael Armstrong?

**(Fanny stands in silence)**

**Mrs Tremlett:** **(To Fanny)** My dear?

**Fanny:** Michael Armstrong is dead.

**Mary:** Dead! **(Mary stands and turns to face the US wall)** Oh do not say so!

**Mrs Tremlett:** **(Stands and goes over to Mary)** Oh, his poor mother! Mary, my dear. I wish we had never left home.

**Mary:** Send the others away, nurse Tremlett. Send them all away. I have no further need to see them.

**(Mrs Tremlett exits right. Mary still visibly upset sits down again to face Fanny.)**

**Mary:** Now tell me then, my poor dear child, about Michael Armstrong.

**Fanny:** Michael Armstrong is dead ma'am. He took the fever and he is dead. I know one of the boys who had been with Michael in the sick ward, and he told me so.

**Mary:** Oh, how very distressing. What is your name, my dear child?

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**Fanny:** My name is Fanny Fletcher.

**Mary:** And who was it sent you to this dreadful place?

**(Mrs Tremlett enters right and sits down.)**

**Fanny:** It was mother's parish that sent me here as soon as she was dead.



**Mary:** Have you no relations anywhere who could take care of you?

**Fanny:** No ma'am, nobody.

**Mary:** Fanny, I came here to take away poor Michael Armstrong. I was to pay money for taking him, and I will pay it now for you. If you will tell me you wish to come, and will be a good girl to me.

**Fanny:** Poor Michael.

**Mary:** Speak, Fanny, before the manager returns. Shall I take you with me?  
**(Fanny collapses to her knees and clasps her hands together, looking at Mary.)**

**Mary:** **(Quietly)** This is the child I shall take with me.  
**(Mary takes Fanny's hand and helps her to her feet. Fanny continues to grip her hand.)**

**Mary:** Have you any bonnet and shawl to put on, Fanny?

**Fanny:** I don't know.

**Mary:** Do not know? How can that be?

**Fanny:** Because I have never been out of the doors since I first came in here.

**Mary:** Poor dear. This is quite intolerable, and the journey will be cold.

**Mrs Tremlett:** All is well, Mary dear. I took the precaution of packing an extra blanket in the carriage that brought us here.

**Mary:** Thank you, nurse. I am most grateful.

**Fanny:** **(Becoming frightened and clinging onto Mary's arm)** Nurse? You are sending me to the infirmary?

**Mary:** No Fanny, my dear child, I am not. You are coming home with me. Mrs Tremlett has nursed and looked after me all my life, and now she is going to help me look after you.  
**(Fanny looks relieved for a moment but clings to Mary's arm even more closely when Woodcomb enters right.)**

**Woodcomb:** So, you have found what you wanted, ma'am. And now, I hope you remember the conditions.

**Mary:** Do not doubt it, sir. **(Taking out her purse and handing him the money)** This is the amount we agreed to repay the trouble I have given you. **(Handing him some more money)** And here's a second sum to atone for the loss of Fanny's labour. I am anxious now to set off on my return. Will you have the kindness to inquire if our carriage is ready?

**Woodcomb:** I don't doubt, ma'am, that your driver is ready to obey orders. And if little Miss Fanny, as we must call her now, will come upstairs with me I will make her look a deal better for her journey.

**Mary:** You are very kind, sir, but I prefer taking her away exactly as I first looked upon her.

**Woodcomb:** Then I shall go to inform your driver.

**(Woodcomb exits left)**

**Fanny:** Shall I never come back here again, ma'am?

**Mary:** No, never, Fanny. I would not be so cruel as to send you back.

**Fanny:** I don't know if it is all a dream.

**Mary:** Do not be afraid. You are not dreaming now. You are starting a new life with me at Milton Park.

**(Fanny continues clinging on to Mary's arm as Mary, Fanny and Mrs Tremlett exit left. Lights off. Tabs close.)**

### Act 3

#### Scene 1 – Castle Yard, York

**(Before the tabs open, the following announcement should be made either from the stage or over the public address system.)**

**Announcer:** It is ten years later; Easter 1832. We are in Castle Yard, York, where a public meeting is being held in favour of reform of the factory system.

**(Tabs open. Half tabs remain closed. Lights up. There is a platform centre with a lectern and a banner above it reading ‘ten hours a day’. A large crowd has gathered offstage who react with cheers from time to time during the speech. Richard Oastler is standing at the lectern facing front.)**

**Oastler:** My friends, I have heard it said that it is the pride of Britain that a slave cannot exist on her soil. Let truth speak out. Appalling as it may appear, thousands of our fellow subjects in this great country are, at this very moment, existing in a state of slavery more horrid than in our colonies. Whatever the size of our trade, if it depends upon supporting the most hellish system of slavery in the world I would say sink your commerce, and arise your humanity, your benevolence and your Christianity. **(SFX. Cheers)** I will not tell you a fiction, but I will tell you what I have seen in this county. Children working in our factories from six o'clock in the morning to ten o'clock at night and then having to walk home to their own village. Take a little female captive, six or seven years old. She rises from her bed at four in the morning on a cold winter's day, but before she rises she wakes during the night and asks, Father, is it time? Father is it time? A cry which is often heard through the night from those little souls dreading the consequences of being late at the factory. She gets up and puts her little rags on her weary limbs, leaves her parents in their bed and trudges onward all alone in the darkness through rain and snow and mire to the mill, at least one mile perhaps two miles. And if the little dear were just one moment behind the appointed time when she arrived with trembling, shivering, weary limbs, there at the factory door stands a monster in human form. And as she passes **(He pulls out a long heavy strap and strikes the front of the platform with it)** he lashes her. This is no fiction! I have seen the effects of such instruments from the neck to the seat of children. The girl I am speaking of was there for thirteen, fourteen or even seventeen hours with only, Britons blush while you hear it, with only thirty minutes allowed for eating and recreation. Homewards again at night she would go, all in the dark and wet, but many a time she hid herself in the mill as she had not the strength to walk home. Eventually she took to her bed from whence she rose no more. As her fond parents stood watching, the infant slave suddenly started from this closing sleep exclaiming, Father is it time? Father is it time? and then she sank slowly back into her father's arms and escaped to where tyranny could no longer reach her. **(Pause)** Let it be our care now to relieve our children from the slavery under which they labour. **(SFX. Cheers)** A clergyman of my acquaintance was wishful to see this system with his own eyes in a factory not far from here, but the owner refused to let him visit. Yet that mill owner is one of the great liberals of the town. He signs petitions against negro slavery, yet, at the same time, he is in

favour of Yorkshire slavery! In all the West Indies there is no parallel for the cruelty and misery caused by mill men in this country seeking their own profit. Some persons have said to me, what business is it of yours, Mr Oastler? What have you to do with factories? My answer is this, I am one of the human race. I see these infants in misery and so long as I live I will exert my powers to relieve them of their bondage. Do I say then that there should be no grades in society, no servants and masters? No, I do not. But I do say that servitude and labour ought not to be so oppressive. **(SFX Cheers)** I ask you not to pull the system down, but to correct its errors and to keep it from falling. Let every man who really and truly hates and abhors slavery come over and help us change this practice in our own land. Let your politics be Ten Hours a Day and whoever offers himself as a candidate at any future election, refuse him your support unless he will pledge himself to the cause. I have no doubt, that when our legislators in Westminster are informed of the evils which exist, they will assert that it ought no longer to be tolerated and declare that children hereafter be protected by the law of the land. Now then, my friends, for a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull together till victory is ours. Let us vow with heart and voice against this oppression, till no man nor woman nor child under Britain's laws shall ever again be a slave. **(SFX Cheers)**

**(Tabs close. Lights off.)**

**Scene 2 – The Royal Oak, York.**

**(Immediately following the rally. One entrance left or right. Lights up. Tabs and half tabs open. Michael, now aged 19, is seated at a table. Richard Smithson enters and joins him. They both have tankards of beer. SFX. People talking quietly)**

- Smithson:** Hello, my friend. I believe I saw you at the meeting. Is this cause new to you?
- Michael:** Yes, sir, indeed it is.
- Smithson:** Then I presume you are a stranger to this part of the country?
- Michael:** Yes, sir, I am from Westmoreland. I am here on a holiday trip.
- Smithson:** And do you care for the poor factory operatives?
- Michael:** If caring for them could do any good, master, I would be there in their midst.
- Smithson:** It does my heart good, young man, to see men like you who are prepared to impart kindness to their poor fellow creatures, having nothing themselves to gain.

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- Michael:** Perhaps you give me credit for more than I deserve, sir. You are right in thinking that I am not one of the factory children, but I was once and Heaven forbid I should ever forget it.
- Smithson:** You have worked in a factory? I should never have guessed as much. I don't think I ever saw a lad who showed so little sign of having suffered from it.
- Michael:** I have seen many a boy and girl crippled for life before they were as old as I was when I ran away. As indeed was – **(SFX. Talking fades out)**
- Smithson:** **(Interrupting)** My good fellow, don't you use them words again. If you ran away from indentures you would be unwise to tell of it. You are safe with me I promise you, but a factory 'prentice not yet twenty-one is hunted down and caught long before he has got among the good hill folks. And where are you venturing now?
- Michael:** To my home town of Ashleigh to find my brother whom I have not seen or heard from for more than nine years.
- Smithson:** Ashleigh? That's my country too. My wife keeps a school at Milton and I was employed as a coachman there. In which factory were you employed?
- Michael:** Brookford Mill, owned by Sir Matthew Dowling.

**Smithson:** Sir Matthew Dowling! It was Sir Matthew who caused my mistress to move away from Milton, and me to lose my position as her coachman. If it had not been for Sir Matthew I believe I might have been there still.

**Michael:** Please go on, I should like to hear the story.

**Smithson:** Why, the long and the short of it was that there was a poor widow called Armstrong.

**(Michael sits upright in shock)**

**Smithson:** Did you happen to know her, my lad?

**Michael:** Yes, sir, but please go on.

**Smithson:** Well, this widow had two sons and one of them was taken in to Dowling Lodge where Sir Matthew pretended to make the greatest fuss in the world about him. But because of some offence of the poor boy's, the old sinner decided to send him 'prentice to Deep Valley, the most infernal place on earth. And the poor widow was coaxed to sign the indentures by Sir Matthew assisted by his daughter Miss Martha.

**Michael:** I was but a boy at the time, but I shouldn't have thought Miss Martha could be treacherous to anybody.

**Smithson:** I can't say I understood the whole of this, but my young mistress took the thing so much to heart that she actually set out to find the boy, but when she got to the murderous place the poor little fellow was dead. And then, the dear hearted lady brought back a pretty little factory girl called Fanny Fletcher instead of him, because she was determined to save somebody.

**(Michael starts shaking)**

**Smithson:** The Lord have mercy on us! What is the matter with you, my good fellow?

**Michael:** **(Takes a drink of beer)** Pray, go on.

**Smithson:** When my mistress brought back the news of the little fellow's death his poor mother just broke her heart and died. Whereupon Miss Brotherton took home the other boy and treated him like her own.

**Michael:** Miss Brotherton? Is that the name of the lady who is caring for my brother?

**Smithson:** Your brother! Who do you mean by your brother, my lad?

**Michael:** Teddy, my brother Edward. I am Michael Armstrong!

**Smithson:** God bless my heart and soul! So you be the boy Miss Brotherton went after and got the idea you were dead.

**Michael:** We are indeed well met, sir, and I am having difficulty recovering from the shock of what I have just learned. That my brother may still be well. Where is Miss Brotherton now? Do you have that information, sir?

**Smithson:** No I do not, since we were all paid off when the place was sold. But I'll tell you the name of him who does know about Miss Brotherton, and your brother too. And that is Parson Bell of Fairly.

**Michael:** **(Excitedly)** Parson Bell of Fairly. Where is Fairly? I must set off directly if you could point the way to me.

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**Smithson:** You do not look in a fit condition to make the journey now, but I suppose at your age I should have done the same. I shall write it down for you. **(He takes out a pen and paper from his pocket and writes)** My name is Richard Smithson and I wish you well. **(He hands Michael the paper)**

**Michael:** **(Takes the paper)** God bless you, sir; and I trust we shall meet again.

**(Michael exits. Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

### Scene 3 – The Parsonage at Fairly

**(The following morning. Lights up. Tabs open. Half tabs remain closed. There is one entrance left. There is a sofa and small table left centre with two chairs to the right of it, and a desk with chair US right. Michael, who is exhausted, and Parson Bell enter left.)**

**Bell:** What ails you my lad? Sit down, my boy, for it is clear you are not able to stand.

**(Michael sits on the edge of the sofa and Bell sits in the nearby chair.)**

**Michael:** I am informed, sir, that you are acquainted with a Miss Brotherton of Milton.

**Bell:** I am, indeed, my boy, but what is that to you?

**Michael:** I want you to tell me, sir **(pause)** and may God give me strength to hear your answer. I want to know, sir, if Edward **(pause)** if my brother Edward Armstrong is alive **(pause)** or dead.

**Bell:** Your brother? Edward Armstrong, your brother? Who then are you boy, in the name of heaven?

**Michael:** I am Michael, sir, Michael Armstrong. But oh, for pity's sake, tell me what I ask.

**Bell:** Michael Armstrong! Why, we have been mourning you as dead for many a year and now you drop down, as though from the clouds. But compose yourself my dear fellow. Edward is alive, and Fanny Fletcher from Deep Valley too.

**(Michael falls forward; his hands are limp between his knees and his head is bowed. Parson Bell goes over to him and puts an arm around Michael's shoulders.)**

**Bell:** Let me fetch you some water. **(He goes to the entrance and calls out)** Mrs Bell, might you bring some water for our friend?

**(Bell returns to Michael. Mrs Bell enters with a glass of water which she gives to Bell. Bell pulls Michael by the shoulders back into a sitting position and gives him the water. Michael drinks. Bell and Mrs Bell sit on the two chairs.)**

**Michael:** Thank you, sir, thank you ma'am. Now, I can talk to you.

**Bell:** First, my dear boy, please tell us how in the world did it happen that when Miss Brotherton went to Deep Valley Mills to look for you, she should come back persuaded that you were dead?

**Michael:** There was a fever, sir, that finished many of the people at Deep Valley and which caused me to be taken to the sick ward. I went into a heavy sleep for many days, which perhaps accounted for Fanny believing I was dead and telling Miss Brotherton so. But unlike many I woke again and recovered. The years wore on and I determined to escape knowing that if I were brought back and punished they could only slaughter me once. One morning I was working in the yard when the



overlookers were engaged in other matters and I managed to get to the entrance way and open the door just wide enough to slip through.

**Mrs Bell:** But surely your absence would have been noticed?

**Michael:** Indeed it was, ma'am, but I was able to conceal myself in a drain.

**Mrs Bell:** In a drain?

**Michael:** Yes ma'am. When I had been on working parties outside we constructed a large drain quite near the entrance. When I escaped I first ran through grass for a few hundred yards, leaving footmarks, until I came to the road that led from the mill. I ran back along the road, leaving no tracks, and crawled into the drain just before they came to look for me. My pursuers saw my footmarks in the grass leading away from the mill and fanned out to look further afield. I lay in the drain all that day with searchers all around me, and when darkness fell I set off.

**Bell:** A most enterprising escape, Michael. Where did you go?

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**Michael:** I returned to Ashleigh.

**Bell:** But was that not a dangerous move to make?

**Michael:** Not really. I was nine years old when I last lived there which had been six years previous, and my appearance had changed markedly. But my return to Ashleigh was not a happy one. Strangers occupied our house and I learned that my mother had died.

**Bell:** And what of Edward?

**Michael:** Nobody knew whether he was alive or dead. At that moment I began to think my life was over. Mother, dead. Edward, probably dead. Me, homeless, friendless, starving, and soon to be caught and carried back to the prison house. I wandered into the fields with no thought of where I was or where I was heading until I reached a point about twenty feet above a river. I remember looking down at the water. I should be safe there, I thought. God forgive me, but if I drown, Mother, I shall go to thee. The next thing I knew, I was lying on the river bank being pushed in the chest by a large man and water was spewing from my mouth. I heard voices saying, thank Heaven, he's safe now, and they took me to stay with them at the Nag's Head.

**Bell:** And who were those good Samaritans who rescued you, Michael?

**Michael:** The older gentleman was Muster Thornton, a kindly yeoman and farmer. He offered me work on his farm and within six months I was tending his flock on the hillsides of Westmoreland.

**Bell:** And what brings you here today?

**Michael:** When I attained the age of nineteen I had the restless desire to revisit Ashleigh and learn the truth about Edward. When I approached Muster Thornton he thought the venture would do me a power of good and I could take as long as I wished. And now, good sir, may I listen to you? **(He sits back)**

**Bell:** Yes, my dear boy. You have much to hear and a wonderful story it is, I promise you. But before I go any further, tell me what sort of a boy was your brother Edward when you saw him last?

**Michael:** Oh sir, he was the dearest, kindest fellow that ever lived.

**Bell:** But what sort of a boy was he to look at?

**Michael:** His dear limbs were crippled by the labour of the mill.

**Bell:** **(Turning to Mrs Bell)** What is your opinion of that, my dear?

**Mrs Bell:** **(Smiling)** I am inclined to think that Michael will have some difficulty identifying his brother when he meets him again. Shall I show him Miss Brotherton's drawing?

**Bell:** Most certainly, my dear. It will save a great deal of description.

**(Mrs Bell goes over to the desk and takes a drawing from one of the drawers and gives it to Michael.)**

**Michael:** But this is a likeness of a tall, graceful young man and a slender young girl.

**(Mr and Mrs Bell both look at each other and then at Michael with a twinkle in their eyes.)**

**Michael:** Can this indeed be my Edward? How beautiful, how noble, how healthful, how intelligent he looks. Can it be true that this is my own dear sickly brother?

**Mrs Bell:** As true as you sit there and look at it, Michael. And who do you think that slender girl may be?

**Michael:** Could it, could it be Fanny Fletcher?

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**Bell:** And there, too, you are quite right. They are both being looked after still by Miss Brotherton.

**Michael:** And looking so fine too. Pray tell me, sir, if you know where they are living now.

**Bell:** They have returned from overseas to London, Michael. And it is with great pleasure that I can inform you that they will be here at the invitation of Mrs Bell and myself in three weeks time. So you may rest with us for as long as you like and prepare to meet your family.

**Michael:** Thank you, sir. I am most grateful to you. More than I can say. We have spoken of Dowling Lodge; pray tell me, sir, what news of Miss Martha Dowling?

**Bell:** I am sorry to say that her father is now in a poor state of health. His business affairs are in a very tottering condition and he is also said to have invested in some speculation which has not materialised. It is now a question, I fear, whether he will be able to get through it. Another misfortune is that after the death of Lady Dowling, Sir Matthew thought proper to marry Lady Clarissa Shrimpton, and so Miss Martha is not permitted to enjoy much peace under her rule.

**Michael:** Lady Clarissa Shrimpton is now Lady Clarissa Dowling! Poor Miss Martha. She was very kind to me and I shall always love her, even though her name is Dowling.

**Bell:** She has suffered dreadfully from believing that she caused your death by the advice she gave your mother about signing the indentures. You have it in your power, Michael, to show your love and do her a great kindness by the very simple process of letting her know that you are alive.

**Michael:** Dear, good, Miss Martha. But how can I pay my duty to her, Mr Bell, without running the risk of being recognised by Sir Matthew. I am not yet twenty one so he would be able, I suppose, to make me serve out my time at Deep Valley.

**Bell:** I do not think he would attempt it now, Michael. There has been a great deal said of late concerning the abominations of the Deep Valley factory. I don't think Sir Matthew would run the risk of having it proved he had a boy kidnapped and sent there.

**Michael:** Then I shall endeavour to meet Miss Martha to tell her of my good fortune. And when I meet Miss Brotherton I shall relate the story of my meeting with Mr Smithson who was once coachman at Milton Park.

**Bell:** Smithson? Where did you meet him?

**Michael:** In York, where we both attended a gathering.

**Bell:** You were at the Castle Yard, Michael?

**Michael:** I was, along with a few thousand more. It was Mr Smithson who suggested I came to Fairly to seek you.

**Bell:** Smithson is a good man. Did you hear my friend the Reverend Bull speak at Castle Yard?

**Michael:** Yes, and Mr Oastler and a good many others. There was talk of a petition of over one hundred thousand signatures being sent to Parliament. Tell me, sir, has the matter not been discussed by Parliament before now?

**Bell:** Indeed it has, for the past thirty years by Parliament and a great many others including myself. This year, however, Mr Sadler has a Bill before the House which we believe could obtain the required support.

**Michael:** I should very much like, sir, to hear of its progress. But first I should renew my acquaintance with Miss Martha Dowling.

**(Lights off. Tabs closed.)**

#### Scene 4 – A country lane

(A lane close to Dowling Lodge in the early evening (as Act 1 Scene 1). Michael is sitting on a stile (optional), front of tabs, looking right. Martha, now aged twenty-three, enters right. SFX. Birdsong)

**Michael:** (Stands up, takes off his hat and bows) You are Miss Martha Dowling, ma'am?

**Martha:** Yes, that is my name. But when did I see you before, young man?

**Michael:** It is a great many years, Miss Martha, but I can never forget your kindness.

**Martha:** (Unsure whether she recognises him) Perhaps if you tell me your name I may remember the circumstances to which you refer.

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**Michael:** Oh, Miss Martha, my name may startle you and therefore I do not like to speak it..

**Martha:** (Looking hard at him) Surely it cannot be Michael Armstrong that I see?

**Michael:** It is indeed, Miss Martha. It is Michael Armstrong. (SFX. Birdsong fades)

**Martha:** But how is it that you are here before me now? I have thought for many years that it was I who occasioned all your sufferings, and your death.

**Michael:** My dear Miss Martha, I recovered from a deadly fever which took many, and I have come back to thank you for all your great kindness.

**Martha:** My kindness? How can that be so?

**Michael:** I know, as nobody else does, the kind motive you had for every word you spoke when I was at Dowling Lodge. I know that whatever was said all those years ago, you had my welfare at heart.

**Martha:** (Clasping her hands together and raising her eyes to the sky) Thank God! Michael, my dear Michael Armstrong. You know not, Michael, what a load you have taken from my heart. I have for years lived under the dreadful weight of being your murderer. In spite of all the calamities which have fallen on my family, I feel that I might now have the strength to be useful to my poor father.

**Michael:** And happy and thankful I shall be if I can do you any good, Miss Martha.

**Martha:** This is very kind of you, Michael. But, alas my father's condition is very dreadful. I fear that his reason is shaken by the misfortunes that have fallen upon him. He has kept all his commercial disasters so completely to himself that even his most

confidential agents were not aware of their extent. My sisters are married now and my brothers are away in different professions, so that I am the only child he has left with him.

**(Betty enters, out of breath.)**

**Betty:** Miss Martha, oh Miss Martha!

**Martha:** What is it Betty?

**Betty:** The master, Miss Martha. Sir Matthew has breathed his last.

**(Martha collapses into Michael's arms, sobbing.)**

**Michael:** Come with me, please, Miss Martha, you cannot remain here. You can do no good. It is all over now. You must come away.

**(Martha continues sobbing.)**

**Betty:** It's no use, young man, to strive with her. I know her better than you do. She will go to Sir Matthew and stay there watching him rather than leave his body to be tended by such as those who are with him now.

**Martha:** **(Composing herself)** She is right, Michael, I have to go to him now and stay until all the arrangements have been made. I shall write to you when I am ready to move on. And now I must return to Dowling Lodge.

**(Martha and Betty move right.)**

**Michael:** A letter to Parson Bell at Fairly will reach me.

**Martha:** **(Turning to face Michael)** Parson Bell at Fairly. And thank you, Michael, for coming here today.

**(Betty and Martha exit. Lights off. Michael exits.)**

## Scene 5 – The Parsonage at Fairly

**(Three weeks later. Tabs open. Lights up. Mary is seated at the right end of the sofa reading papers on the table. Fanny, now aged 21, is seated at the left end of the sofa. Edward, now aged 21, is sitting at the desk facing the wall. Michael and Parson Bell enter left and stand in the doorway. Mary looks up.)**

**Bell:** We have a visitor.

**(Mary, Fanny and Edward turn to look at Michael, who stares back. There is a pause.)**

**Mary:** Will you have the kindness, Mr Bell, to tell me who this young man is and where he comes from?

**(Parson Bell smiles to himself but says nothing.)**

**Mary:** But, wait, there is something familiar in his appearance.

**(Edward gets up from the desk and walks towards Mary, who holds up her hand.)**

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**Mary:** Stay, Edward, stay. Look at him. Look at him dearest Edward and tell me who he is like.

**(Edward stares at Michael not recognising him. Michael smiles at him.)**

**Michael:** Edward! Teddy!

**Edward:** Mike!

**(Edward and Michael meet below the small table, shake hands then clasp each other over the shoulders with their left hands. Mary puts both hands to her mouth in surprise. Fanny stands up in shock, sits down again and repeats the action. Parson Bell sits in the chair right of table.)**

**Edward:** Is this a miracle? How can this be?

**(Michael and Edward move apart.)**

**Michael:** It is no miracle, Teddy. I escaped from that darkest of holes, Deep Valley, and fled to safety, my dear, dear brother. And, you, let me look at you **(stands back)** and let me see you walk.

**(Edward walks a step or two and then skips before returning to Michael's side.)**

**Michael:** We have Miss Brotherton to thank for that, I understand.

**Edward:** Yes, she took me to the most able surgeons in London and their science did not fail them.

**Michael:** I am so pleased, Edward. And how have you been occupied these last eight years?

**Edward:** We have been travelling all over the world, Michael. First France, then Italy and, lastly, Germany for two years which I spent at University in the Rheingau

**Michael:** University!

**Edward:** Yes, my brother. And I am now qualified to teach in schools.

**Michael:** My brother, a schoolteacher!

**(They hug again then Michael turns to Fanny, holds out both hands and brings her to her feet.)**

**Michael:** And my dear friend Fanny, how handsome you are!

**Fanny:** Oh Michael, I can never forget that it was I who caused it all. It was I who kept you in that horrid place for years! Had I not told Miss Brotherton you were dead it would have been you who was the happy object of her bounty instead of me. Oh, how can you ever forgive me?

**Michael:** **(Putting an arm round Fanny)** My dear Fanny, I forgive you utterly.

**Mary:** And where is my dear, good nurse Tremlett? In the midst of this happiness she must not be left out.

**Fanny:** **(Moving away from Michael)** I think she may be in the garden. Shall I go and call her?

**Mary:** No, you shall not, dear Fanny. It was I who dragged the dear, good soul from pillar to post in order to find Michael. I shall bring her myself to hear the glad tidings of his restoration.

**(Mary exits left. Parson Bell stands. Michael and Fanny, arm in arm, join Edward below the small table. Michael puts his other arm round Edward. Mary and Mrs Tremlett, who is walking slowly with the aid of a stick, enter left and stand in the doorway.)**

**Mrs Tremlett:** Do you know, my dear, who that young man is? I never saw Mr Armstrong nor Miss Fanny neither seeming to be so extraordinarily intimate with any one before, and a stranger at that. It is very odd.

**Mary:** It is very odd, Mrs Tremlett, very odd indeed. There is no denying it. But Mr Armstrong and Miss Fanny have taken such a liking to this young man that I think I shall be obliged to ask him to live with us.

**(Mrs Tremlett looks puzzled and shakes her head in disbelief.)**



**Mary:** I shall confuse you no longer, good Mrs Tremlett. This is Michael Armstrong for whom we once searched the whole of Lancashire, and believed was dead, but has now been restored to us.

**Mrs Tremlett:** Michael Armstrong! Well bless my soul. It is a great joy to meet you, young man.

**Michael:** And I to meet you, Mrs Tremlett.

**Bell:** Would you like to join us Mrs Tremlett?

**Mrs Tremlett:** If you will excuse me, Mr Bell, I should like to return to the garden where I may still enjoy this delightful afternoon sunshine.

**Bell:** Of course, Mrs Tremlett.

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**(Mrs Tremlett exits left. SFX. Doorbell sounds. The women resume their seats. Mrs Bell enters right and whispers to Parson Bell.)**

**Bell:** I took the liberty of inviting one other to our gathering today. Miss Martha Dowling has this minute arrived. **(To Mrs Bell)** Could you ask Miss Dowling to join us my dear?

**(Mrs Bell exits right and returns with Martha. Parson Bell takes Martha to Mary.)**

**Bell:** Miss Brotherton I believe you know.

**Mary:** Miss Dowling, I well remember you with great affection and esteem. May I also offer my condolences on the loss of your dear father?

**Martha:** Thank you, Miss Brotherton, for your kind words, which I feel are not deserved when I think of the hurt that my poor father and I inflicted on Michael Armstrong.

**Bell:** I do not think you know Michael's brother, Edward Armstrong.

**Martha:** It is indeed a pleasure, Mr. Armstrong. Michael often spoke of his affection for you when he was with us at Dowling Lodge.

**Bell:** And Miss Fanny Fletcher, who was with Michael at Deep Valley.

**Martha:** Miss Fletcher. Although you were not at my father's establishment I feel I should apologise to you for the treatment to which you have been subjected. Are you well now?

- Fanny:** Very well, thank you ma'am. Miss Brotherton has very kindly been looking after me these past few years.
- Martha:** I am sure we all have a great deal for which to be thankful to Miss Brotherton.
- Bell:** Indeed we have, but I have some news for you all. Parliament has approved the latest Bill to restrict child labour in factories.
- Mary:** Oh that is such good news, Mr Bell, such good news.
- Bell:** The new act will increase the minimum age at which a child be employed to nine years of age. Children under thirteen will be limited to working eight hours a day, and those aged from fourteen will work no more than twelve hours. No child will work between eight-thirty in the evening and five-thirty in the morning.
- Mary:** I am so pleased, Mr Bell, but I fear that the more wicked factory owners will pay little heed to the new arrangements.
- Bell:** That has indeed been the situation in the past, Miss Brotherton, but under the new Act the Government will appoint inspectors to tour the factories and investigate any evidence of mistreatment. I thank heaven for the progress that has been made and feel we are entering a new era for the factory children.
- Fanny:** Please sir, what will happen to Deep Valley and all the children there?
- Bell:** I do believe that Deep Valley will be among the first to be visited, Fanny, and it will very soon after be closed down and the children returned to their parishes.
- Martha:** And what of Brookford Mill, Mr Bell?

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- Bell:** Ah, what indeed, Miss Dowling. Brookford has been much on my mind of late. It employs many men women and children from Ashleigh and, having spoken to men of influence in that locality, I conclude that the establishment does have a future. In view of the present financial circumstances of the Dowling family, however, it might be appropriate to establish a trust under which it could operate under a board of trustees of businessmen, philanthropists and so on. I have already discussed the prospect with Miss Brotherton who has indicated her willingness to give financial support to such an undertaking.
- Mary:** It has long been my wish to return some of the wealth enjoyed by the Brotherton family to such a commendable cause.

**Martha:** Your generosity knows no bounds, Miss Brotherton, and I should be honoured to support the undertaking in any way I can.

**Mary:** Thank you, Miss Dowling. It would seem entirely appropriate to have a Dowling on the board of trustees. And as you are the only member of your family to have expressed any interest in Brookford Mill, I shall certainly have no hesitation in bringing your name forward when the time comes. But we are today welcoming the return to this world of Michael Armstrong, and I wish to know of his plans for the future. Will you be returning to Westmoreland, Michael?

**Michael:** I may well do so, ma'am, but my employer was kind enough to say that if I found suitable alternative employment here he would understand.

**Bell:** Which conveniently brings me to my next question, Michael. Parsons will not be remaining at Brookford and so the vacancy has arisen for a Superintendent. Would you be agreeable to fulfilling that role, and would you be vigilant in ensuring that the new Act be applied?

**Michael:** At Brookford? That is indeed a challenge you have set me, sir. I have not worked in such an environment before.

**Bell:** Not worked, my dear boy, but you have enough personal experience of the place to make you admirably suited for such a role.

**Martha:** Please accept, Michael, I can think of no better person to take up the post. I am sure that Westmoreland has many attractions, but you belong here.

**Michael:** Thank you, Miss Martha, your words encourage me greatly.

**Edward:** But, Michael, we shall see no more of you when we return to London than we have during these last few years.

**Mary:** Unless, dear Edward, my involvement as a trustee at Brookford demands my presence here. I feel that a permanent return to Ashleigh might be a consideration.

**Edward:** But what can I do here, Mary, to further my career in education?

**Bell:** The new Act includes a provision for two hours of education per day for the young children, and so teachers will be required, Edward. Miss Fanny, you have not spoken.

**Fanny:** My only wish, sir, is that Michael and Edward can be happy after all the hurt they have been caused.

**Bell:** The sentiment of all of us, I am sure, Miss Fanny.

**Mrs Bell:** **(Standing)** Well, after that, I do believe that tea is called for. Let us follow Mrs Tremlett's excellent example and proceed to the garden where the late afternoon sun will still warm us.

**(All stand, murmur their agreement, and exit left. Tabs close. Lights off.)**

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