

Characters

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|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Lord George Elyngeham (M) | - | A ghost, still alive and kicking in the ether. |
| Great, great Aunt Agnes (F) | - | Ancient but as sharp as they come. |
| Emily Richards (F) | - | A student. Kind-hearted, energetic, curious. |
| Lady Millie Elyngeham (F) | - | The Dowager Baroness. Artsy and privileged. |
| Lord Miles Elyngeham (M) | - | Baron Blethersby. Shy, stiff, but means well. |
| Amanda Chavsley (F) | - | PA to Miles. |
| Mr Goring (M/F) | - | A civil servant from County Hall. |
| Chancellor Hardcastle (M/F) | - | The Chancellor of Duffham University. |
| Voice (M/F) | - | An offstage voice giving instructions. |

Act 1

Scene 1 – Drawing Room

(The action takes place from the end of May until July in the drawing-room of Bletheringham Park, the estate of Baron Blethersby, and in an office at Duffham University. The scene opens on the drawing-room of Bletheringham Park. Upstage centre, we have a grand fireplace over which is a coat of arms. Stage right of the fireplace is a bookcase, which conceals a hidden entrance, and a large chair and side table. In front of the fireplace is a low coffee table, next to it, stage right, is a sofa, stage left is an easy chair, upstage left we also see a gigantic potted fern. There is also a large family portrait on the wall far stage left. The room is comfortable; it is a private sitting/drawing room of the family. In the chair stage right of the fireplace is George, completely naked, and reading a very large, strategically placed newspaper. Agnes enters stage left and walks across and stops stage left of him. He doesn't look up from his paper.)

Agnes: (Surprised) What are you doing here?

George: Reading a newspaper.

Agnes: I can see that! But what are you doing *here*?

George: This was my house for many years. (He turns a page) I can read a newspaper in the drawing-room if I so wish.

Agnes: (She continues across the stage and exits stage right) Well, put some clothes on then! No one wants to see you sitting around looking like a wrinkled old nut sack.

George: If that is the case, I take it you will be wearing a balaclava from now on, then?

(Agnes' arm appears and gives him the V-sign, then disappears again offstage)

George: (Glancing at her gesture briefly) Oh, two balaclavas is it?

(After a moment, George sighs, folds up his newspaper, stands, smooths his hair, and saunters off stage right, whistling.)

Voice: (From off stage left) If you could wait in the drawing-room, Lady Elyngeham will be along shortly. This is a private room, not open to the public; I'm sure you understand.

Emily: (Entering stage left, and talking to the voice offstage) In here? Right, OK, I won't touch anything, no problem. (Emily walks further in and looks around the room) Nice. Impressive fireplace. (Pause, she looks back offstage left, then begins to whisper in the room) Lord George...Lord George?... Are you here? ... *George!* ...Typical.

(Emily puts her bag on the sofa and goes to examine the painting stage left and then the coat of arms above the fireplace)

Emily: (Reading the motto) '*Ubi est thesaurus tuus, ibi est et cor tuum etiam.*' Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. That sounds familiar. Interesting. I prefer '*Illegitimi non carborundum*'.

(Agnes enters from out of the bookcase secret passage. Emily suddenly notices her.)

Emily: Did you...did you just appear from out of that bookcase?

Agnes: Might have.

Emily: Oh, no! Not another one.

Agnes: I wasn't expecting anyone to be in here, to be honest. What do you mean 'another one'?

Emily: Another ghost! What is it with popping out of bookcases? One harassing me is bad enough. But I suppose you live here, do you? If 'live' is the right word. I didn't mean to be insensitive.

Agnes: I do. **(She gives Emily a hard look)** Where's George?

Emily: I have no idea, sorry. He pesters the life out of me, gets me to come here, and then is nowhere to be seen or heard! I don't know. How do you know Lord George, then?

Agnes: He is my oldest brother. **(Agnes flicks her hand at the portrait, then crosses and sits in her chair stage left.)** The question is: how do *you* know George?

Emily: Accidentally, I can assure you. I'm completely new to all this ghosty lark.

Agnes: Pray do tell. It's nice to have someone to talk to. What do you mean by 'ghosty lark'?

(Agnes regally indicates for Emily to sit on the sofa. Emily perches on the edge)

Emily: When I applied for my Masters at uni, my mum told me about a trust fund set up for dad's family at Duffham, set up decades ago mind. When the uni wouldn't answer my questions about it, I did a little digging.

Agnes: And dug up old George?

Emily: Not literally! I bluffed my way into the restricted section of the library...

Agnes: **(Nodding in approval)** Go on.

Emily: And found out that the trust was originally set up by Baron Bletheringham, the Lord George Elyngeham, way back sometime after the war. Then he starts talking to me! Lord George, as a ghost. He popped out of a bookcase just like you did. It gave me a real shock.

Agnes: Of course it would. He died three barons ago.

Emily: He kept pestering me about some family treasure that he wants restoring and wouldn't leave me alone; he even started appearing to me in other places around the university. The problem was he was butt-naked!

Agnes: Good gracious!

Emily: This has been going on for months. The final straw came when he started parading about bollocky-buff in my lectures, and once even in the campus cafeteria! It put me off my breakfast. In the end, I just gave in and agreed to help him. So if you're wanting something similar, I'm a bit busy at the moment. Sorry.

Agnes: What's your name, girl?

Emily: Emily, Emily Richards. **(Makes as to offer her hand to shake)** Oh. We can't really shake hands, can we? But it is nice to meet you.

Agnes: Emily Richards **(thinking)** ... Have you been here before? The name seems familiar.

Emily: No, I'm from over in Ashton Magna. I've not even been here on a school trip. Sorry, I should have asked *your* name in return.

Agnes: The Honourable Miss Agnes Elyngeham, **(Agnes inclines her head to look at Emily on the side as if sizing her up)** but you can call me Aunt Agnes, I think; because I like you. And George seems to like you too.

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Emily: Aunt Agnes, can I ask you what the family is like, the current one? To try and track down this lost family treasure, whatever it is, I've got an appointment with Lady Elyngeham this morning, and I hope to speak to the current baron. But I'm feeling a bit nervous. She thinks I'm a researcher from the university.

Agnes: Really. Bluffing your way in again? Well, Lady Millie is nice enough, and the current baron, Miles, is a bit of a pillock but his heart's in the right place. Just like my third brother Donald, his great grandfather; he's great with horses and loves his books but people are another skill set altogether.

Emily: Are you allowed to call a baron a pillock?

Agnes: When you're as old as me, dear, you can say what you like.

Emily: And I suppose not everyone can hear you.

Agnes: It's more a case of not everyone listens.

Emily: Do you ever get lonely, Aunt Agnes?

Agnes: Lonely? **(She seems taken aback by the question)** Well, I...I miss George. He hasn't been around much lately; haunting you at the university it seems. And I miss some others that have gone now **(Agnes nods towards the portrait behind her)** but I have the current family. And I've plenty of mischief to be getting into besides to keep me going, don't you worry.

(Enter Millie stage left, wearing a painting smock and tidying her hair with one hand. She crosses to stage right.)

Millie: So sorry to have kept you waiting, Miss Richards. I was in my studio and completely lost track of time! Once a painting grips me, I'm in another world.

Emily: **(Standing, and holding out her hand to shake, but also wondering whether to curtsy)** Not a problem, Lady Elyngeham. I've had time to admire the lovely room.

Millie: I see you've met The Honourable Miss Agnes Elyngeham.

Agnes: We've been having a *lovely* chat, Millie, dear. Miss Richards has quite an interest in the family history.

Emily: You're not a ...**(in pain)** oooh.

Millie: Miss Richards, are you alright?

Agnes: It looks like a touch of indigestion to me. Here, have a peppermint, dear.

(Emily leans over and takes the offered peppermint that Agnes produces from her handbag.)

Emily: **(Whispered)** But you popped out of a bookcase! I thought you were a ghost, like Lordy George!

Agnes: **(Whispering back.)** It's a secret passage, an old priest hole! *Very* secret, mind! I'm still in the land of the living. Just. I'll keep your secret if you keep mine. Are we good?

Emily: Crikey. Yes. We're good. **(She pockets the peppermint.)**

Millie: **(Oblivious to the conversation, Millie has been removing her painting smock)** I hope we can answer your questions, Miss Richards, it's rather exciting to have a university researcher here.

Emily: Please, call me Emily.

Millie: Emily, what a lovely name. The current Baron, Lord Blethersby, my Miles, is quite a historian, and Aunt Agnes is, of course, the perfect person to talk to about the family.

Agnes: Because I've outlived them all so far! I'm history walking. Hahaha. Although, it's more of a shuffle these days.

Millie: Well, yes, but still...

(Enter Miles from stage left, looking rather stressed. He crosses to stand with Millie as he's speaking)

Miles: There you are, mother, I thought you were in your studio. You won't believe what's going on at the front gate! If you're thinking of going out today, I don't recommend it.

Millie: Oh, I have tea with Patricia Fitzpartridge at three-thirty.

Miles: You can't get out of the drive, so unless you're going to hike over to her place across the fields, you'll have to give it a miss! We've got every hairy, socialist, eco-thug in the county camped out on the front road...

(Agnes coughs, obviously indicating Emily)

Millie: Oh, Miles dear, this is Emily Richards, she's a researcher from the University of Duffham come to research the family. Emily, Baron Blethersby, Lord Miles Elyngeham.

Miles: **(Notices Emily for the first time.)** Oh. I thought that was tomorrow. What are you doing here?

Emily: Researching; it's what we researchers do.

Miles: You've got blue hair.

Emily: **(Touching it a little self-consciously.)** It's just a streak. I did it to brighten things up for the summer.

Miles: But it's blue.

(Agnes coughs, again, very obviously)

Miles: Oh, well, I'm terribly sorry, Miss Richards...

Emily: Emily.

Miles: Um, Emily... but now really isn't a good time. An interview is quite out of the question. We seem to have somewhat of a social media-induced crisis.

Millie: Whatever do you mean, Miles?

Miles: **(Turning back to Millie and away from Emily)** Overnight, someone posted photos online of the trees we cut down as part of the wilder...wilderling...whatever project...

Emily: Wild-ing project?

Miles: Yes, wilding project. And now everyone thinks we're wantonly destroying ancient woodlands! Darren showed me just now when I was in the stables. It's a media mess and now there's that lot out the front gate with placards and everything! I'm just praying it hasn't got as far as local TV or radio.

Millie: Oh, dear. Whatever shall we do? I was so looking forward to tea this afternoon.

Emily: Excuse me, but why not just set the record straight?

Miles: I'm sorry? **(Turning stage left towards Emily.)**

Emily: If I can make a suggestion? So I'm guessing you've felled a few of the trees to open up the canopy, let the light through to encourage further growth, etc, right?...

Miles: How do you know about all this?

Emily: Um, agricultural upbringing, studies, and such like.

Agnes: She's a clever girl, listen to her, Miles.

Emily: I would suggest answering like with like.

Miles: I will not wave a placard.

(Miles begins to turn away again. Miles turns to her again as Emily is speaking)

Emily: No, I mean on social media! Post a series of photos of the opened-up woodland; talk about the benefits to the ecosystem, show some felled logs placed to encourage insects and native beetles, blah, blah, blah. You know, that sort of thing.

Miles: Unfortunately, I do not know 'that sort of thing'. Even if I talked with Irvin, the estate manager, my secretary usually deals with all this media stuff and she's away for the week on holiday. So we're back to square one. **(He turns away from her.)**

Emily: All you need is a mobile phone and the passwords.

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(Miles turns back to face her, surprised.)

Millie: I'll be in my studio until anyone needs me. **(Millie leaves stage left.)**

Emily: Sorry. All you need is a mobile phone and the passwords, my Lord Baron Blethersby.

Miles: **(Brushing it aside)** Lord Elyngeham will suffice. No, it's just that you make it sound so easy. My assistant, Amanda, gave me the impression that you practically need a degree in marketing to do this sort of thing.

Emily: Hardly! My 10-year-old cousin can do it. She does it for the family farm shop and camp site. I can give you hand, if you'd like?

Agnes: Fascinating as all this media blah-blah is, why don't you two go off and dig up passwords and that, so I can take a nap.

Miles: **(Moving stage left, indicating the door)** I think Amanda has a folder in her desk. Are you sure it's not too much trouble, Miss Richards?

Emily: Please call me Emily. And no, I don't mind.

(Miles leads Emily off stage left. Agnes settles down and begins to gently snore with her mouth open. George pops his head out of the bookcase, still looking 'naked'.)

George: Where is the girl?

Agnes: **(Without moving or opening her eyes)** I'm not asleep, you know.

George: You could have fooled me.

Agnes: **(Opening her eyes)** That's never been hard to do. Stay where you are! I can see quite enough of you already.

George: Have you seen a young woman, mid-twenties, about so tall...? **(He indicates Emily's height)**

Agnes: Emily, you mean?

George: (**Sounding surprised.**) Yes, Emily.

Agnes: We've met. What are you playing at, George? Pestering a young gel like that and sending her on some wild goose chase, turning up at her cafeteria in the nude? It's disgraceful. And what is with all this parading about naked nonsense, anyway?

George: It's not nonsense! I spent a lifetime being strangled by rules and regulations, suits and ties, and faculty robes; I shall spend my eternity enjoying my freedom! And I'm not playing at anything. (**Sounding pompous and serious**) To rest in peace a person must have certain things finished; to go to the grave with regrets is a terrible thing.

Agnes: That old guff won't work on me, George. You are up to something. Tell me what's going on or...

George: Oh, I'm fading, I'm fading (**He disappears back into the bookcase**)

Agnes: Silly old fool.

(**Enter Emily from stage left**)

Emily: (**To off stage left**) I'll just get my bag. (**To Agnes**) We're going to walk over to the woods and take some photos, I'm hoping I can ask him some questions on the way over.

Agnes: It's quite a walk over there and back so you'll have plenty of time. Miles loves Bletheringham Park and knows the family history very well.

Emily: But not as well as you, I'd bet. If I may, I'd like to come back and talk with you, especially as you knew Lord George.

Agnes: Oh, I know him. He was just here.

Emily: Really? Does he talk to you too, then?

Agnes: At times, when it suits him.

Emily: Oh, thank goodness I'm not the only one. And I'm not mad, because that did cross my mind.

Agnes: If you are, that makes two of us.

Emily: And thank you for believing me. I haven't told anyone else because of, well, obvious reasons, so I've been struggling to work it all out on my own.

Agnes: George is my brother, and this is my family. Thank *you*, my dear, for bothering with it all.

Emily: I'm thinking that if I can work out what this lost family treasure is, maybe it will set us on the path to finding it.

Agnes: Why didn't he just tell you what it was? That seems so much easier.

Emily: I don't know; he would just fade away if I asked him outright.

Agnes: Hmmmm.

Emily: I wonder, maybe it was too painful for him and it interfered with his spectral signal or something.

Agnes: 'Or something' is right.

(Enter Miles, stage left, he moves stage right as he's speaking)

Miles: Irvin is over with the deer herd, so he'll meet us at the East Woods in a bit. I'm sorry, that we have to walk over there but Irvin took the Land Rover with him early this morning.

Emily: That's not a problem, I love walking! And the park here is just beautiful. It makes me feel like summer is on the way. And we can talk as we walk.

Miles: Right, yes. That. **(Miles doesn't look very enthusiastic about it)**

Agnes: Emily wants to know about the family history, Miles.

Miles: Really? **(Looks interested)**

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Agnes: He's quite the historian, you know, Emily.

Emily: You'll probably think I'm a huge geek, but this is an amazing day for me, to be in a place like this, where the past and the present meet, side by side with the land, mankind and nature together! I've got goose bumps!

Agnes: That'll be the draft that comes down the chimney.

Miles: **(He perks up considerably)** In that case, I'd be happy to talk with you. Sorry, I had thought you wanted to interview me about being the baron. That sort of thing isn't really my cup of tea, and I've had a few magazines and the like wanting interviews. I was rather caught off guard by Mother agreeing to your visit. So, um, shall we go?

Emily: Yes, of course. **(Emily turns to leave stage left.)**

Miles: Actually, we'll go out this way. My walking boots are in the kitchen.

Agnes: Oh! You're getting the private tour, Emily! No photos of our washing up, now.

Miles: See you in a bit, Aunt Agnes.

Emily: Bye.

Agnes: **(In a conspiratorial whisper.)** I'll let you know if George turns up again.

Emily: **(Returns the whisper)** Thank you!

(Emily and Miles leave stage right.)

Agnes: This should be fun.

(LFX: Lights dim to off)

Scene 2 – Drawing Room

(LFX: Lights up. Friday afternoon, in the drawing-room. Enter Agnes stage right, followed by Miles carrying a tea tray with a tea pot, etc.)

- Miles:** Shall I put it on the table, Aunt Agnes?
- Agnes:** That'll be lovely. Thank you.
- Miles:** You've got an extra cup, are you having tea with mother? I thought she was out until at least five this afternoon.
- Agnes:** I am expecting Emily to arrive at any moment.
- Miles:** Really? Oh.
- Agnes:** Yes. I haven't seen her to talk to since Tuesday - you have been very selfish, Miles, keeping her all to yourself all week.
- Miles:** I wouldn't say that Aunt Agnes, it's Irvin who is to blame.
- Agnes:** Irvin...The gruff lad, with a beard like a goat? **(She sits in her chair.)**
- Miles:** Really, Aunty, he's pushing 60; he's hardly a lad.
- Agnes:** When you reach my age everyone but Queen Elizabeth and God is either a lad or a gel. So how is young Irvin to blame?
- Miles:** Irvin, a man of few words, which he will occasionally string together to grace a sentence, is enthralled with Emily! I introduced them on Tuesday when we went over to take the photos, remember?
- Agnes:** Of course, for this wild project.
- Miles:** Wilding, or re-wilding, it's called both. I guess he thought Emily was a temporary replacement for Amanda, who he cannot abide...
- Agnes:** Hmm. I've always liked Irvin.
- Miles:** But then she starts asking all these questions about the project and a light sort of went on behind his face and he starts talking nineteen to the dozen with her. To be honest, I didn't follow all of it, well, most of it actually. The next thing I know, he's requesting she works with him and she's over the moon. So of course, I said yes. I've been up to the east woods myself a couple of times this week...
- Agnes:** Every day, going by what I've seen from my window.
- Miles:** Yes, well, maybe I have. It's all rather fascinating.
- Agnes:** I bet it is.
- Miles:** I've been bossed about all week by Irvin and Emily, moving logs and clearing stuff...
- Agnes:** You've enjoyed it though.

Miles: It's been invigorating! But then I've always loved May, all the new life and spring springing.

Agnes: Hmm. It's sprung. Pour me a cup would you, I don't like it too strong.

Miles: **(Preparing the cups to pour the tea.)** I mean, I know the wilding project was a good idea, that's why I wanted to go ahead with it. But this week, I feel like it's really coming alive; working with those two has helped me feel a passion I hadn't had before.

Agnes: Fancy that. It must be spring.

Emily: **(Off stage)** Hello? Knock, knock?

Agnes: I'm in the drawing-room, come straight in, Emily.

(Enter Emily, stage right. She is wearing cut off shorts and a t-shirt, she isn't wearing any shoes.)

Emily: Sorry, I'm a bit late. I wanted to wash the dirt off before I came in.

Agnes: You are right on time. Miles was just being mother and pouring the tea.

Emily: Hello, mother.

Miles: **(He smiles at her and her joke, tea pot in hand)** Hello, Emily. How do you take your tea? No milk, is that right?

Emily: Yes, black, no sugar, thanks. I've left my boots next to yours as I didn't want to walk mud through the house.

(Miles pours her tea)

Agnes: I'm sure they'll be quite happy next to Miles' shoes. Now come and sit down, Miles tells me that Irvin has been working you hard.

Emily: **(Emily sits on the upstage end of the sofa)** This week has been amazing, but I must admit, my back is looking forward to a rest this weekend!

Miles: Have you got plans for the weekend?

Emily: Yes, I'm going back to see my family in Ashton Magna. With the May bank holiday, it gives me a nice long weekend.

Agnes: I'd like you to fill in some blanks for me. How does a girl like you, a history researcher, know so much about trees and eco-thingumies?

Emily: **(With a smile, confessing)** I'm not actually studying history.

Miles: No, she's doing a master's degree in biodiversity and conservation. It's amazing what she knows! I think Mother got the wrong end of the stick, which is not unusual, and assumed Emily was a history researcher when she asked about the family history.

Emily: I was a bit embarrassed, to be honest, and it seemed easier not to correct her. I'm particularly interested in how estates like this one can be managed to promote integral biodiversity and sustain the estate itself at the same time. It's my specialty.

Miles: I read the book you lent me. It has given me a lot to think about. I found it very inspiring.

Agnes: Hmm. Well, Miles, instead of standing about like a spare part, why don't you go and get yourself a cup and top up the pot while you're at it?

Miles: Right. I'll be back in a moment.

(Miles exits stage right with the tea pot.)

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Emily: **(Watches Miles leave.)** I'm glad he's gone.

Agnes: Oh? I thought you two were getting on rather well.

Emily: Oh, I didn't mean it like that! We are, well, you know what I mean. I'm just excited because I think I've figured it out, Aunt Agnes! I think I know what Lordy George wants us to find.

Agnes: Really?

Emily: Yes. We've been talking a lot while we've been working together this week and he told me about the Blethersby Dagger!

Agnes: Oh, of course! Now, why didn't I think of that?

Emily: Apparently it went missing after the war?

Agnes: That's right.

Emily: Do you think Lord George knew something about its disappearance or has discovered something, you know, 'on the other side'?

Agnes: I couldn't say, dear. And just so you know, I've told him to pack in all this naked lark, or we won't speak to him.

Emily: He's naked here too? Oh, thank goodness I haven't bumped into him this week. I was hoping it would be different here; I thought maybe his ghostly mojo just wasn't strong enough to manifest clothes over at the university.

Agnes: No, he's just a silly old goat.

Emily: Do you remember much about the Blethersby Dagger, or the war, Aunt Agnes?

Agnes: I remember seeing the dagger itself when I was a young gel. As for the war, the house was occupied by government and army personnel during the war, all very hush-hush;

codes and messages and whatnot. Although I could tell you a thing or two about what went on here. **(She taps the side of her nose.)** We had to move out, of course, and all the family's personal belongings, such as they were, and the heirlooms and paintings and such, were put into storage. But after the war, when it came to restoring Bletheringham Park, the dagger was nowhere to be found.

Emily: It had just disappeared? But it was an integral part of the family history, wasn't it?

Agnes: It had been passed from one baron to another on the event of their succession to the barony for generation upon generation.

Emily: Did anyone in the family have a special interest in it?

Agnes: **(Agnes becomes more introspective, almost sad while she speaks)** Not especially. All three of my brothers were away in the war. Frederick, my second brother **(Agnes indicates the family portrait)** never came home. Donald, my youngest brother, came home but was never really the same; like he'd left a part of himself somewhere else. Even George would never speak to me about it, and he was always my favourite brother. I did my bit too, you know, in the war.

Emily: What about after the war when everything was unpacked? Was George here then?

Agnes: Oh, it was quite some time later when everything was all put to rights. The old house was a bit of a mess when we could finally reclaim her. George was in a hospital in Kent for a long time, and then he installed himself at Duffham University and became a famous professor. He was already in Duffham when my father discovered that it was missing.

(Enter Miles, with a cup and teapot)

Miles: What's missing, Aunty?

Agnes: The Blethersby Dagger. Emily was just asking me about it.

Miles: We were talking about it yesterday.

Agnes: Miles can tell you all about it. Excuse me a moment, children. I won't have another cup just now. I need to take a pill. They're in my rooms. **(Agnes moves to stand)**

Miles: Has Katrina gone home already? I can get them.

Emily: Who is Katrina?

Miles: Aunt Agnes' maid, helper.

Agnes: No, you two chat. I can get them myself.

(Agnes exits stage left.)

Emily: I hope I haven't upset her. She was just talking about her brothers and the war.

Miles: She may just want a moment, but she'll bounce back.

(Miles pours himself some tea and sits, a little self-consciously, on the downstage end of the sofa)

Emily: Can I ask you, just how old is Miss Elyngeham?

Miles: Well, she is actually my great, great aunt. She's the youngest of the family. **(He gestures towards the portrait)** Let's see, she had at least one card from the queen already, it's on the mantelpiece in her rooms. I think she was born in 1922 or 23...

Emily: She's amazing! She's as sharp as a pin.

Miles: A little too sharp, I think at times. She is physically much slower than she used to be, but she was still riding her pony up to the age of 86!

Emily: I want to know her secret.

Miles: It probably involves alcohol. She is very well preserved.

(There is a slightly awkward pause, while they sip their tea and Miles thinks about what to say)

Miles: So, you're going home for the weekend?

Emily: Yes, I've not been home since Easter. Sorry about cancelling our lesson this afternoon, but I want to beat the traffic if I can.

Miles: Not at all, I quite understand. I hate traffic myself; it's why I stay out of London as much as possible. And I think our social media profiles are looking pretty good - I can't believe how easy it is to do!

Emily: You don't need a master's to do it, and you're a quick student.

Miles: You're a good teacher.

Emily: Have you got plans for the bank holiday?

Miles: Well, actually there is the May Fair here in the grounds. It happens every year; it's all very historical and traditional, with maypole dancing and stalls by the Women's Institute and the Scouts. I have a cake competition to judge.

Emily: Very important baronly duties! I'm sorry I'm going to miss it.

Miles: Yes. Me too. I'll save you some of the winning cake if you like.

Emily: Aw, that's very thoughtful, but it will be stale by the time I get it.

Miles: Oh?

Emily: I'm back in lectures next week, and I have a paper to finish.

Miles: Oh. I see. I mean, you've made such a contribution already to the project here.

Emily: **(Tentatively)** And I would love to come back, if I may?

Miles: **(Pleased)** Of course. I wouldn't dare upset Irvin.

Emily: **(Putting down her tea cup)** Actually, I'm going to be really cheeky and ask if I can come back the weekend after next? I have some ideas for the area near the woodland

pond that I'd like to run past a colleague this week, he's so into aquatic environments that he's practically got gills... *and*, it would be a dream come true if I could do my research project here, with your permission of course, and I'd have to talk with my professor...

Miles: I'm sure that could be arranged.

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(Emily squeals in excitement and hugs him. Miles looks pleased and awkward)

Emily: Thank you!!! That would be amazing! **(She releases him)** Oh, sorry, I got a bit carried away.

Miles: It's quite alright ...

Emily: It's just at Knepp Castle, the place was transformed in only ten years. Now they have every species of owl native to Britain, and an insect diversity you wouldn't believe. You know, they found ten different species of beetle in one cow pat...

(Miles slurps his tea)

Emily: Sorry. I'm eco-geeking, aren't I?

Miles: **(Placing his cup on the table)** Yes, to use your phrase, you are eco-geeking. Cow dung is not usually discussed at afternoon tea.

Emily: Sorry.

Miles: Don't be. My area of weakness is history. I have killed many a conversation with some random barrage of information about something nobody else cares about.

Emily: Maybe we should start an organisation, 'Geeks Anonymous', and teach social skills and the art of conversation to the socially awkward.

Miles: I'd be the first in line to sign up! I hate making small talk and chit chat.

Emily: You talk to me alright.

Miles: You're very talkable-to. And you've let me spout all week about the history and the plans I have for this place, but it's hardly your common or garden topic of conversation.

Emily: Point taken. **(She shrugs)** So make like Mr Darcy and practice.

Miles: I'm sorry?

Emily: You've never read *Pride and Prejudice*? It's a classic! Not even seen the film?

(Miles shakes his head or shrugs.)

Emily: Just what is the aristocracy coming to nowadays?

Miles: Good, is it?

(Emily gives him a hard look.)

Miles: Right. I'll look it up, then. **(Pause)** Have you emailed in the photos from today?

Emily: No, I'll do that now.

(Emily takes out her phone. After a moment, she starts to move it about in the air to get a signal.)

Miles: The signal is dire in here. It's one of the older parts of the house. It's why the offices are in the other wing.

(Emily gets up and moves around trying to get a better signal, she moves downstage left and holds up her phone.)

Emily: It's better over here by the window.

(SFX: Light door knock. Enter Amanda, stage left, behind Emily. She fixes on Emily and doesn't see Miles at first.)

Amanda: **(Quite aggressively.)** What are you doing in here? This is a private area. Please leave immediately!

(Emily turns, surprised, to see who is talking.)

Amanda: Did you hear me? **(Amanda steps into the room, towards Emily)** You need to get out...

Miles: It's fine, Amanda. We're having tea with Miss Elyngeham.

(Emily retreats stage right nearer the sofa. While they are talking she crosses stage right and behind the sofa to where she was sitting previously at the upstage seat of the sofa but she doesn't sit. Miles remains seated.)

Amanda: Oh, I see, Lord Elyngeham. I'm sorry, I didn't see you there, sir.

Miles: I wasn't expecting you back at work until next week?

Amanda: As I'm back already I wanted to pop in and make sure everything was organised for the May Fair; to see if you wanted me for anything over the weekend? I can make myself available to you.

(Enter Agnes, stage left.)

Agnes: Oh. You're back, are you? **(It's clear Agnes does not take to Amanda.)**

(Agnes continues straight across the stage and sits in her chair, obviously with her back to Amanda. Emily offers to pour Agnes tea but she shakes her head.)

Amanda: Good afternoon, Miss Elyngeham.

Miles: Sorry, Emily, this is Amanda, my personal assistant.

Emily: Oh, I see. It's nice to meet you, Amanda.

(Emily crosses behind Agnes to shake hands with Amanda, who gives her a half-hearted, limp handshake and watery smile. After, Emily steps back but remains near Agnes, stage left of centre. Amanda remains stage left. She is obviously not invited to join them for tea)

Miles: Emily has been helping with the wilding project.

Amanda: I see.

Emily: Yes, I wouldn't usually take tea with a baron looking like this. I've just finished for the week.

Amanda: **(Looking Emily up and down with disdain.)** That explains it. I've been personally liaising with the expert on the subject, a Mr Birding. You won't have heard of him. Lord Elyngheam has implemented a very complex bio-project to reintroduce native species to the park, maybe Mr Irvin explained a little to you while you were digging.

Miles: Emily is very excited about the project; she is doing her masters in biodiversity and conservation.

Amanda: Is she? Of course, she is.

Emily: Although digging is an integral part of my studies; spade care, hoe management, it's all covered.

(Emily says it with a completely straight face. Agnes covers a snorty laugh with a cough. Miles is oblivious to the undercurrents between the women)

Miles: Is that so? It's a very complete course then.

(Emily nods and smiles at him)

Amanda: Although it's maybe not something you want to bother with, my Lord; if you hold the overall vision, you can leave the nitty-gritty to other people. Surely that's why you have people like Mr Irvin and such **(indicating Emily)** to do the dirty grunt work.

(Amanda aims the comment at Emily who checks her fingernails again and brushes off a little dirt from her clothes)

Amanda I can implement the vision, coordinate the experts and the workers, and you won't even have to bother yourself about it. You can go back to the comfort of your study and your books.

Emily: Oh, I've found Lord Miles to be very hands on in it all. I've been impressed, especially after all the work you put in with us in the East Wood. **(She gives Miles a warm smile)**

Miles: It was that book you lent me! Though I have double homework to do now: two books. At least one is a film.

Amanda: Lord *Miles*?

Miles: Er, yes. Irvin calls me Lord Miles, and we've all been working so closely together all week, it seemed daft to have Emily 'Lord Elyngeham' this and 'Lord Elyngeham' that me every two minutes.

Agnes: That makes sense, dear.

Miles: There are some amazing photos of what we've been doing, I'll have to show them to you later, Aunt Agnes.

Emily: I've sent you mine for today. **(Waving her phone.)**

Amanda: **(Moving towards Emily)** If you email the photos to the estate office, they can be accessed, categorised, filed, and then uploaded to our social media platforms.

Emily: **(Mildly)** Yes, I know, Lord Miles and I have been doing that all week.

Miles: It was surprisingly easy to do! And our profiles all look amazing now, thanks to Emily.

Amanda: Right. Well, I'm back now so you don't need to bother with that anymore. I can take over, thank you **(Amanda takes Emily's phone.)**

Emily: **(Mildly)** That's my phone.

(Amanda silently hands back the phone.)

Agnes: It looks like everything is under control here, my gel; you can be off and enjoy your weekend.

Amanda: Thank you, madam.

Miles: Absolutely, I wouldn't hear of you cutting your holiday short. Did you have a nice time, wherever it was you went?

Amanda: Yes, thank you. So, I'll see you bright and early Tuesday morning then, my Lord.

Miles: I'll be out in the paddocks on Tuesday, but I'll leave you some work on your desk. There were some letters that arrived this morning I haven't got to yet.

Amanda: Of course, Lord Elyngeham. Goodbye, Madam.

(Agnes vaguely waves in her direction. Amanda leaves stage left without saying goodbye to Emily, just a loaded look.)

Emily: She seems nice.

(Agnes nudges her and tries not to laugh again.)

Emily: I must be off too, if I'm going to miss the traffic.

Agnes: Oh, I did so want us to take tea together. She's coming back, isn't she, Miles?

Emily: Yes, I'm coming back, if I may.

Agnes: We shall take tea together then. I'll buzz you in the week.

Miles: Buzz?

Agnes: You may be a social media virgin, Miles, but I love it!

(Agnes takes her phone out of her handbag and waves it at him)

Miles: That's a newer model than mine!

Agnes: The present is just as fascinating as the past, dear boy. And as for the future - woo-hoo!

Emily: Aunt Agnes, take care of yourself this week, don't you behave yourself for one second, and I'll see you soon.

(Agnes takes and pats her hand)

Miles: **(Standing)** I'll walk you out, Emily.

Emily: Thank you.

(Emily and Miles move as if to exit stage left SFX: door knock. The door opens and enter Amanda followed by Goring)

Amanda: **(To Emily)** Oh, you're still here? Lord Elyngeham, this gentleman insisted on seeing you, I'm so sorry, he would not be put off until Monday.

Goring: I should think not! This matter cannot be put off or ignored.

Miles: Ah. Mr Goring.

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Agnes: **(Rolls her eyes.)** Oh, good Lord, that is all we need.

Goring: **(Full of self-righteous indignation, almost spite)** It has come to our attention at County Hall that ...

Agnes: **(Standing)** Behold my field, and see that it is barren! I'm going to get Katrina to make me sandwich.

(Agnes shuffles off stage right, the others stare after her for a moment, surprised. Emily is trying not to laugh)

Miles: She's getting on a bit, sorry.

Goring: As I was saying, it has come to my attention at County Hall that complaints have been filed against you. A letter has been sent to you by the relevant department, but I decided to look into it personally.

Miles: Ah. It must be in the unopened correspondence on my desk, it's been a busy week.

Goring: We all have busy weeks, Lord Elyngeham (**he says the name like it tastes nasty**) and we don't all have secretaries to run around after us. There is no excuse for lax administration. (**Looking in his briefcase/document case and taking out a paper**) I just so happen to have a copy of the accusations with me.

(Goring hands Miles the paper. Miles reads the sheet, but Goring has it memorised.)

Goring: You have been reported for:

1. Unauthorised works to a conservation area.
2. The felling of protected trees.
3. Unauthorised change of use of an area.
4. Changes made to *public* footpaths.
5. Land being left in such poor condition as to affect the amenity of the area.

Turning areas into a savage wilderness will put the public at risk and block public access and right of way! It cannot be allowed to continue.

(Miles looks horrified at all this.)

Amanda: All relevant paper work was completed before the project began, Mr Goring. There is nothing 'lax' about my administration! Besides, the work is being carried out on private land; land that belongs to the estate.

Goring: *Private* land, Ms Chavsley? Private land with public footpaths and public right of way, private land that includes protected environments.

Amanda: I'd like to see your proof, Mr. Goring!

Goring: Well...

Emily: Excuse, me, Mr Goring?

Goring: **(Blinking and twitching his nose)** Yes? Who are you?

Miles: This is Miss Richards, one of the wilding experts on the project. She is from Duffham University.

Goring: Well, Miss Richards, you of all people should understand the gravity of this situation! No one, no matter who they are, can go about destroying woodlands and reshaping our countryside.

Emily: No, absolutely not. I can completely understand your concern in this. However, I'm sure you are aware of the 1984 amendment of the legislation, subsection four, where it states that a land owner has the right to undertake felling and clearing for the protection and betterment of the environment? I believe that is what has been happening here.

Goring: **(Blinks repeatedly, as if to assimilate the information)** Subsection 4... That may be so, Miss Richards, **(smugly)** but he's been reported. I must demand evidence – photographic evidence and a written report on all work carried out and all plans for the future. You have twenty one days, or action will be taken.

Miles: Right. Thank you, Mr Goring for bringing this to my attention. Personally.

Goring: My pleasure.

Miles: Amanda, please show Mr Goring out.

Amanda: My pleasure.

(She holds the door open for Goring who nods his goodbyes and leaves, followed by Amanda.)

Emily: That Goring was a piece of work. It looks to me like he hates your guts.

Miles: I need this like a hole in the head! He and my father took great offence to one another, and now he's out for my blood. How am I ever going to satisfy him? Our project is doomed!

Emily: **(Touching his arm, and comforting him)** Hey, steady on, Lord Miles. I happen to know someone who loves writing reports on projects like this. And I know they wouldn't mind working on it with you.

Miles: You do? Who?

(Emily gives him a big smile.)

Miles: You'd do that? Emily, you're a lifesaver!

Emily: Nah, I'm completely selfish, projects like this are what I do for fun! I might even be able to wangle extra credit at uni for it.

Miles: **(Looking relieved)** 'Amendment of the legislation, subsection four' - you really sunk his battleship! Would you be free at some point next week to start? I can come to Duffham, if that's easier.

Emily: Sure. You can 'buzz' me and we'll sort out a time. Maybe Thursday?

Miles: Thursday. Great.

Emily: **(Checking the time)** So much for missing the traffic.

Miles: I'm sorry to have kept you.

Emily: Don't worry, it's been fun. Bye.

(Emily moves to exit stage left.)

Miles: Thursday. Bye.

(Emily exits with a smile. LFX: Lights to blackout)

Scene 3 – Drawing Room

(LFX: Lights up.)

Emily: **(Offstage)** Have we lost them?

Miles: **(Offstage)** Maybe. I think they went into the offices in the other wing. At least, that's where I hope they went.

Emily: I can hear Amanda's voice.

(Emily and Miles enter quickly stage left.)

Emily: I think they're coming this way.

Miles: I thought we'd lost them in that tour group.

Emily: I know, over here.

(Emily goes over to the bookcase and starts looking at the titles of the books)

Miles: I wasn't expecting him to come back so soon! We've still got another week before that report has to be in. Emily, what are you doing? If we want to avoid them, we have to go! We can go out through the kitchen. **(He points off stage right)**

Emily: Encyclopaedias ... atlases... Oh! The Scarlett Pimpernel! That'll be it.

(Emily pulls the book and the secret passage door opens slightly.)

Emily: Yes! Quickly, in here.

Miles: What on earth...What is that...?

Emily: It's a priest hole; you know, a secret passage!

Miles: How the blazes do you know about it?

Emily: Aunt Agnes ... Come on, Miles!

(Emily grabs his hand. They both quickly dart into the passage and close the door as we hear Amanda's voice off stage left.)

Amanda: **(Off stage left)** This way, Mr. Goring.

(SFX: A quick tap at the door. Enter Amanda and Goring stage left. They remain polite throughout the exchange but it is clear they detest each other.)

Amanda: We usually don't go into the more private part of the house but I'm sure Lord Elyngeham will want to resolve this issue as quickly as possible.

Goring: Oh, we wouldn't want to disturb Lord Elyngeham's privacy, would we?

Amanda: **(Laughs nervously, unsure whether Goring is being sarcastic or not.)** Oh, I'm sure it will be fine. This drawing room is sometimes used for receiving visitors.

Goring: I'm honoured.

Amanda: It's very odd; I was sure that I saw him coming this way.

Goring: **(After a brief pause.)** Well, Ms. Chavsley, it's not just Lord Elyngeham's time that is precious, I also have a schedule to adhere to. Please pass on to his Lordship how unimpressed I am to have been kept waiting.

Amanda: Then may I suggest, in future, that you call and make an appointment before coming?

Goring: Or may I suggest that Lord Elyngeham calls me at the County Hall offices and makes an appointment with *me*? May I remind you that the accusations we have received against Lord Elyngeham are of a serious nature and the department takes these reports very...seriously.

Amanda: Of course. And may I remind you that the felling license was all in order and that Mr Birdwell, our wilding consultant, comes highly recommended by the department of forestry itself.

Goring: **(Looking like he's sucking lemons.)** Thank you, Ms. Chavsley. I'll see myself out. If I get lost, I'll just ask a tour guide.

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(Goring turns on his heels, clutching his briefcase/document bag, and leaves. Amanda continues to smile sweetly until he is off stage.)

Amanda: The jumped-up, pompous, officious, tight-arsed, little ... How dare Elyngeham leave me to deal with him! Right. Where is he?

(Amanda takes out her mobile and begins to call Miles as she storms off stage left. Miles and Emily are still in the secret passage)

Emily: Thank goodness she'd left before it rang!

Miles: Quite! Although, **(taking his mobile out of his pocket)** oh, I've got no signal. Maybe the walls are too thick.

Emily: It's cool we can see through into the drawing-room; the bookcase must have a false backing. Amanda was pretty shirty with boring Goring, and she's not very happy with you either.

Miles: No, she's not. But surely dealing with people like Goring is part of her job? Mrs Boxley, my father's old secretary guarded him like a dragon!

Emily: Amanda strikes me as more of a snake than a dragon.

Miles: Shall we get out of here...how do we...?

Emily: I don't know, she didn't exactly tell me about that...push the door...

Miles: I am pushing! What do you mean, she didn't exactly tell you?

Emily: Well, I just guessed at which book opened it. Feel around the door. Is there a catch or a lever or something?

Miles: I can't find anything! It's too dark in here ... Great! So we escaped Mr Goring to get stuck in here!

Emily: Don't be so dramatic, it's a secret passage so it must go somewhere. Aunt Agnes uses it regularly, I think.

Miles: Really? I didn't know that.

Emily: That's because it's a secret. Come on, let's explore. That is unless you're afraid of the dark or spiders?

Miles: I am not. In fact, I shall lead the way with my phone light...

(SFX: a slight echo on their voices)

Emily: How gallant, my Lord... **(giggling.)**

Miles: Are you laughing at me again?

Emily: Of course...

Miles: Ungrateful wench.

Emily: I heard that...

(Their banter fades as they go down the passage. Time passes, shown by music being played or lighting moving across the stage. Agnes also walks through, stage left to stage right. She returns a book to the bookcase as she goes. After another pause, SFX: door knock, and enter Amanda again, on her phone)

Amanda: **(Some incoherent muttering. Then speaks angrily.)** Answer your phone, you useless moron!

(Amanda spins 180 degrees on her heels and exits stage left. Off stage. SFX: a slight echo on his voice)

Miles: So that's two dead ends.

(Miles and Emily appear in the secret passage)

Miles: Going by the direction of the tunnel, that last one would lead to out by the stables somewhere. I wish we knew how to open the doors from the inside.

Emily: Absolutely! I could seriously do with some lunch or at least a cuppa about now; **(coughing, slightly)** I feel like I've hoovered up a century's worth of dust!

Miles: Yes, I know what you mean.

Emily: Hang about... **(Emily moves back down the passage to offstage.)**

Miles: Where are you going?

Emily: **(SFX: a slight echo on her voice. Offstage.)** I remember some crates stacked up where the tunnel widens...here they are...

(SFX: Sound of glass bottles clinking.)

Miles: Emily? Are you OK?

Emily: Yeah... **(Onstage)** Take a look at this. Is it anything drinkable?

Miles: It's Guignolet, cherry brandy. French. Hmm, this is quite a vintage...

(Emily takes the bottle and pops it open.)

Miles: Did you just open it?

Emily: Well, it's not for decoration, is it? And I'm dying of thirst! Smells okay, a bit strong maybe, but it smells like cherries. Can we drink it?

Miles: Yes, I suppose so...

Emily: **(She takes a hefty swig.)** Tastes like cherries too... **(coughs)** Hoo! Vindaloo cherries!! Wow, that's strong. **(She takes another swig)**

Miles: **(Takes the bottle and has a small mouthful, savouring it.)** Very nice. Very, very nice. I wonder what this costs per bottle? Aunt Agnes must have known about this little lot.

Emily: I bet she did! **(She takes another big swig of the bottle.)** Hooo-wee! That's a dust buster!

Miles: Steady on, it's not fruit cordial, Emily.

Emily: It's made of fruit, how bad can it be? Come on, let's check out that right-hand tunnel. There's no one around here to let us out, is there?

Miles: No. I suppose so. I might be able to get a phone signal somewhere else.

Emily: Oooof! This stuff is strong. I can feel it going all the way down.

Miles: Vintage brandy isn't to be quaffed like apple cider, Emily. Maybe I should carry the bottle...

(Emily and Miles exit down the passage. Time passes. Millie enters stage left and waltzes through in her painting smock, humming to herself, and exits stage right. After a pause, George pops up from behind the giant fern/plant stage left, looks around, and disappears again. After another pause, Millie re-appears stage right carrying a banana and a large flower. She walks through the room and sees a vase on the bookcase or the small table.)

Millie: Oh, that will be just perfect. **(She places the flower in the vase and admires it, then experiments with putting the banana in different places in and around the vase)** This will be a very interesting composition, I think. **(She moves stage left, taking**

everything with her) Banana and flower: a modern botanical commentary...Oils or guache? Abstract or ... no, *avante garde!*

(Millie leaves stage left. Time passes. After a moment, Miles, followed more slowly by Emily appear in the passage. Emily is drunk.)

Miles: It makes the most sense to wait here. Someone will come into the drawing-room and then we can alert them...have you still got that cherry brandy?

Emily: Yup. It's very sippable...sippabibble.

Miles: Sippabibble?

Emily: Yes.

Miles: How much have you sippled - I mean sipped?

(Emily shows him the bottle)

Miles: Half a bottle? Emily, do you feel alright?

Emily: I really think I'd like to have a lie-down. There's a sofa in there, a nice, big comfy one.

(Emily pushes up against Miles and the bookcase door)

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Emily: Hello? Hellooooo?

Miles: There's no one there.

Emily: **(Sounding lost.)** There's no one there. Where's Aunty Aggie when you need her. I like Aunt Agnes. She talks to George too.

Miles: Who's George?

Emily: Sshhh! It's a secret. I've got to help George.

Miles: Right. Is George your ... your boyfriend ... or something?

Emily: *No way!* That would be weird, **(considering it for a beat)** on so many levels.

Miles: This is weird: being stuck in an ancient secret passage with an inebriated, blue-haired woodland expert. Things like this don't happen to me.

Emily: Well, maybe they should. Having a little adventure on a weekday is good fun. It stops you from getting all stuffy.

Miles: Do you think I'm stuffy?

(Emily pulls a face as if to say 'maybe a little'.)

Emily: It's not that bad in here. What's up, don't you like rubbing shoulders with the hoi poloi?

(Emily wiggles her shoulders and giggles)

Miles: I have nothing against your shoulders...

Emily: You do at the moment. So anyway, what's your problem with my hair being blue? It's only one little bit.

Miles: It's unusual. Unexpected. Like the rest of you, I suppose.

Emily: Why don't you like it?

Miles: I do, now. It's very...you.

(Pause. Emily peers into the room. Miles discreetly smells the top of her hair - he doesn't sniff, more breathes in her nearness.)

Emily: **(Amused)** Did you just smell me?

Miles: I...er...um...

Emily: You did; you sort of *breathed* me in.

Miles: Well. You smell like apples. And I just wondered if it was your shampoo.

Emily: *No*, appley-fresh body lotion.

Miles: Oh, body lotion. Well, it smells nice.

Emily: **(Looking out into the drawing-room, distractedly, with a sigh.)** Your bum is nice.

Miles: Pardon?

Emily: **(Still looking into the room.)** You have a nice bum.

Miles: Oh. Right. Thank you. I suppose I do rather a lot of walking and horse riding, though no one has ever told me that before. **(Brief pause)** Do you think, once we get out of here, one evening you'd like to... Emily?

(Emily turns towards him, with a big sleepy smile, and face plants into his shoulder and leans into him.)

Miles: Emily... Are you asleep?

Emily: All tired...Comfy shoulder... **(Some more muffled words as she falls asleep.)**

Miles: How can anyone sleep standing up? Although after half a bottle of cherry brandy... **(Slight pause.)** You definitely smell of apples ... and sunshine; how can someone smell of sunshine? **(He sighs and puts his arms around her.)** You're a blue-haired, little apple sunshine fairy. **(He leans his head on hers.)** I hope you don't snore.

(After a brief pause, Amanda enters stage left, talking loudly on her phone.)

Amanda: Uh-ha, ya, ya. Exactly!

Miles: Amanda! Amanda...

Amanda: So, no, Tracy, I can't come out Friday...Oh, I wish! No, no fancy parties, not with *this* one...Not as fast as I'd like, but I am making *some* progress with him. He's just so ruddy boring!... Yeah, I can cope, you know me! ... Hmmm, I would have preferred that Viscount, yes, but he turned out to be gay, didn't he, so I've ended up with this baron...yeah, same plan as last time: make myself indispensable and then charm the pants off him! It's worked like a treat before, only this time I want to be a missus, not just a mistress! What's yours is mine and what's mine is mine and all that...No, I don't think he is, 'coz I caught him looking at my legs last week, so it is skirts only from now on...Yeah, yeah, I know, but after a bit of 'wifely duty', these posh knobs all have separate bedrooms so sex can be taken off the menu. A girl can only take so much.

...Competition? You've got to be kidding, Tracy! He never goes anywhere! He pops off to London to some House of Lords thingy - and they're nothing but a bunch of sodomised inbreds - and then he's back to his books, his smelly horses, and worrying over the estate! There's some stable girl who fancies him, but he's too oblivious to notice. Oh, and some tree-hugging eco-bitch from the university is hanging around at the mo. You should have seen the dirt under her nails, Tracy! And she thinks she's really something with her master's and all that...I know!!!... His mum is loopy on paint thinner, and the only other person round here is some crumbly relic old aunty who is gonna peg it any day so they won't get in my way...Yeah, totally pathetic, but at least mild mannered Miles was an easy target... Anyway, I'd better go and find the stupid lump, he's probably round the back talking to his horse, or to the back of his horse! ... I know, right?!

(Amanda exits stage left laughing into her phone)

Miles: Amanda? ... Naim's ravens! It seems you were right, Emily. She is more snake than dragon. That was...really something...to hear all that. Gosh, what am I going to do about her?

Emily: **(Still asleep.)** Hmhmhmff

Miles: And I wasn't really looking at her legs, they just walked into my field of vision. I don't want you to think I'm one of those men who stare at women's legs. That's not very gentleman-like.

Emily: Apples...

Miles: Yes, I expect so.

(Enter Agnes stage left)

Agnes: Time for a power nap, I think.

(Agnes moves to sit in her chair)

Miles: Aunt Agnes! **(He knocks on the wall.)**

Agnes: George? Is that you again?

Miles: Who's George?! No, it's me, Miles.

Agnes: Miles? What are you blathering about?

(Enter Millie stage left.)

Agnes: **(Looking around her.)** Are you there? I can't hear you very well. Where are you? Knock again.

Millie: Are you feeling alright, Agnes, dear?

Miles: I'm here. **(He knocks on the wall again.)**

(Millie gives a little shriek and looks about.)

Miles: Well, we both are, Emily and I. Behind the bookcase. We can't find the way out.

Agnes: Of all the silly...

(Agnes walks stage right of centre to the bookcase, muttering, and opens the door. Miles appears, still holding up a sleeping Emily, who is holding the brandy bottle like a teddy bear)

Millie: Oh, heavens! Miles! Emily! ...Has she fainted? Or suffocated?! Is she alright? Shall I call a doctor?

Miles: Aunt Aggie's cherry brandy got the better of her, I'm afraid.

(Millie moves to help Miles and Emily. Agnes puts the bottle of brandy on the table.)

Agnes: Get her on the sofa. You found my secret stash then? Bother. I'd had that hidden since 1972.

Millie: What were you doing behind the bookcase, Miles? **(Millie moves to look)** Oh, there's some kind of space here.

Miles: It's a secret passage, mother. But it's not on any map I've ever seen.

Agnes: It wouldn't be very secret if it was marked on a map, 'Here be a secret passage,' now would it? You daft pudding. **(Moving back to her chair)**

Millie: Really, Aunt Agnes, dear, you must remember Miles is the baron now.

Agnes: **(She sits heavily.)** Bum to the barony! I've known five barons in my lifetime, so you can hardly colour me impressed at my age! I suppose little Miss Emily told you about my priest hole, did she?

Miles: She shouted something about 'Pimpernel' and dragged me in there to escape Goring and Amanda.

Agnes: Pimpernel? Clever girl. The *Cherry* brandy, you say?

Miles: Yes. Nearly half a bottle.

Agnes: Oh! We'll not be getting much out of her for a while. We had best let her sleep it off.

(Millie lays a blanket over Emily.)

Millie: Poor lamb.

Miles: Right. **(Stretching)** We were in there for *hours* so I'd like to find something to eat and get some fresh air. I'll take the dogs down to the lake.

Millie: I'll heat you up a spot of lunch, Miles, dear.

(Millie exits stage right, Miles follows but turns back and looks over at Emily.)

Miles: Will she be OK, Aunt Agnes?

Agnes: Of course, she will. My cherry brandy is medicinal; it was a gift from a French Comte, I'll have you know. But I'll stop here with her, just to be sure. You can bring us in some tea later on. Off you go, now.

(Miles smiles and nods, looks once more at the sleeping Emily, then exits stage right.)

Agnes: Well, isn't that a turnout for the books. Sleep well, little Emily.

(Agnes settles to sleep in her chair. After a brief pause, we hear some genteel snoring from Agnes. LFX: Dim lights, and up again.)

Emily: **(Begins to wake up on the sofa)** Hmm. What's this...?

Agnes: **(She is listening to something on her phone. She pops off her headphones and puts them and her phone back in her handbag.)** Good afternoon, Emily, dear.

Emily: Aunt Agnes?

Agnes: The one and only.

Emily: How did I get here?

Agnes: Miles put you there to sleep off my excellent cherry brandy. Remember that?

Emily: **(She sits up)** The brandy...yes, I remember we were in the secret passage...and Miles said...and I said...bum!...Oh, *man!*

Agnes: Are you alright, dear?

Emily: I thought you weren't supposed to remember anything after you get drunk, Aunt Agnes?

Agnes: That's only in films. Reality comes right back to bite you.

Emily: Oh, can't believe I said that!

Agnes: Have you never been drunk before?

Emily: **(Emily shakes her head, then holds it.)** Ooooooh.

Agnes: Best not do that. Do you feel a little woozy?

(Emily nods carefully.)

Emily: **(With a watery smile.)** My dad always drank enough for the rest of us put together. Apart from the occasional glass with a meal, it's 'not my cup of tea' as they say.

Agnes: Heavy drinker was he?

Emily: **(She swings her legs down to the floor and sits round properly on the sofa)** It's what killed him in the end. That and flipping the car blind drunk.

Agnes: Oh, I'm so sorry, dear.

(Emily just shrugs and gives a sad smile)

Agnes: Right, my girl, go wash your face and drink as much water as you can. Use the downstairs bathroom on the right. Get some fresh air, and brush the cobwebs out of your hair. There are some toiletries I keep in the left-hand cupboard; you can help yourself. Then we'll see about getting you a sandwich.

(Emily stands up carefully, and stretches.)

Emily: Fresh air and cold water are what I need. **(She starts to move and then turns back)** You're lovely, Aunt Agnes, you know that?

Agnes: Poppycock. I'm an arsey old baggage and you're smelling up my drawing-room. Get on with you.

(Emily gives her a big smile and exits stage right. Agnes has a moment's peace to sigh and chuckle to herself, then Millie enters stage left, followed by George, who shadows her every movement while swishing his pink bloomers about. Millie, who gestures to show each part of her wonderful, new artistic idea, is shadowed by George.)

Millie: There you are, darling. I'm looking for feathers. My new composition just must have feathers. To give lightness, to give it a heavenly, other-worldly touch...Don't you have some on an old hat or something I could take? Or an old feather boa, oh yes! A boa encircling the man-made vase and lone, sentinel flower...with the banana...Actually, I have a white one; a boa that is, not a banana. White feathers, how poetic, how angelic... **(She turns to exit stage right and then calls over her shoulder)** Fish for dinner tonight, dear. **(Exits stage right.)**

George: And they worry about *you* going doolally!

Agnes: **(Laughing)** George, don't you ever do that again. Millie may only make infrequent forays to planet earth, but she is lovely. You shouldn't make fun of her.

(Enter Emily, stage right.)

Emily: I'm feeling more human now. George! Where have you been? Nice bloomers by the way.

George: I rather thought so. I've borrowed them off some countess I bumped into. Real silk, don't you know; slides across the old botty like a summer breeze. Every gentleman should have some.

Emily: George, what are you like?

Agnes: Pack it in, you daft old coot. Come and sit down, Emily.

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(Emily crosses and sits on the sofa and behind her, unseen by Emily and Agnes, Miles enters with a tea tray.)

Agnes: Why don't you tell George what's been going on?

Miles: What has been going on? **(He puts down the tea tray)** And who is this George? I keep hearing his name. I'm glad you're awake, Emily, by the way.

Emily: Oh, thanks, Miles.

George: **(George introduces himself)** I'm George. Nope, this one can't see or hear me either. I didn't think so. What is it, do you think? Lack of imagination? Lack of sensitivity? Lack of something.

(Agnes makes signals for Emily to tell Miles. Emily shakes her head at first, then gives in)

Emily: **(Reluctantly, hesitantly)** George is Lord George Elyngeham, the baron who died in 1978.

George: I did a lot of other things to be remembered for, besides die in 1978!

(George moves and sits on the chair stage right of the fireplace, looking rather put out, probably sulking.)

Miles: When great Grandfather Donald took over the barony, yes ... but you said 'tell George' - that's present tense! He is definitely dead; there's a grave in the family chapel. He'd be even older than Aunt Agnes if were he alive.

Agnes: A veritable fossil. **(She takes a deep breath)** I think it's time.

Miles: Time to what?

Agnes: Time to come clean.

Emily: What?

Miles: What?

George: What?

Agnes: You need to tell him.

Emily: Who? George?

Miles: Who *is* George?

George: I'm George!

Agnes: No, him. **(Indicates Miles)**

Emily: No, not him.

Agnes: Why not him?

George: No, not him.

Miles: Yes, why not him?

Agnes: He's not as dumb as he looks.

Miles: No, what?

George: Are you sure?

Emily: **(Quietly)** I don't want him to think I'm nuts.

Miles: Right now, I think you're both nuts. **(He moves to sit near Emily on the sofa.)** Look, Emily, whatever it is I'm sure we can sort it all out. If you've found yourself in some kind of trouble...

Agnes: It's more like trouble has found her.

(George pokes out his tongue at her.)

Emily: Aunt Agnes, you're not helping. Miles, you'll think I'm crazy, but the George she means really is Baron George.

Miles: Right...

(Emily looks pleadingly at Agnes who nods for her to continue.)

Emily: **(Giving up, and explaining)** Well, you already know that I originally came here to do some research on the family - although it all started with me researching my *own* family and while I was doing that, you see, Lord George appeared to me in the library.

George: The restricted section!

Emily: And wouldn't leave me alone until I agreed to help him.

Agnes: He positively plagued the poor girl.

George: Plague is a bit strong, Aggie!

Miles: Lord George...dead Lord George.

Emily: Yes.

Miles: Who's dead.

Emily: Yes.

George: But alive and kicking in the ethanol.

Emily: **(To George)** That's alcohol.

Miles: I'm beginning to think it may well be.

Emily: You mean the ether.

Miles: And you can get him to talk to you?

Agnes: It's getting him to shut up that's the problem.

George: Oh, I say!

Miles: Have you spoken to anyone about these...voices?

Emily: Only Aunt Agnes, and only because she straight out asked me about George first. She popped out of the bookcase the first day I was here and I thought she was ...

Agnes: Another one! Another ghost. Yes, I remember. He talks to me too, when he feels like it. Look, Miles dear, I know this is a lot to take in, but we can all agree that Emily is not the flighty type; she is a scientist! And if a historian like yourself can't believe in the past having a voice, I don't know who will.

(Miles gets up and paces around to think)

Miles: So let's just say that what you're saying is true, that Lord George comes and talks to you - why you?

Emily: I honestly have no idea! Maybe because I was looking up about your family. Nothing, *nothing* like this has ever happened to me before.

Miles: What does he do? Does he want something?

Agnes: He has tasked Emily with finding and returning a lost treasure to the family. And she believes it to be the Blethersby Dagger!

Miles: The Blethersby Dagger? Yes, that is a lost family treasure. I see. **(Pause)** So, the last few weeks you didn't actually want to talk with me, you were just fishing for this mad scheme...I.....

Emily: Miles, I loved talking with you! About everything. Please don't think...

Miles: I don't know what to think, Emily.

Agnes: He needs proof.

Emily: How can I...?

Agnes: Not you, dear. You, George!

George: What?

Miles: What? Wait. He's here? Right now? Where?

Emily: **(Together)** Sitting in that chair.

Agnes: **(Together)** Sitting in that chair.

(They both indicate the chair and George.)

Miles: That was officially freaky.

Agnes: Come on, George. This is all your fault, the least you can do is get off your arse and help us. Don't you have a party trick or something you can do?

Miles: That chair over there?

George: Party trick? *Party trick?* Where is the respect? Where is the awe for the other-worldly?

(Enter Millie stage right with her feather boa, behind Miles. She stays far stage right as if just coming in the door and surveying the scene.)

Agnes: Stop stalling and do something, George!

George: **(Jumping to his feet)** Right. I'll show you. Tell him it's all for the family. The family is everything.

Agnes: He says it's all for the family,

Emily: The family means everything.

George: Recite the motto! Give it a bit of drama, Aggie old girl. **(George strides across to the portrait on the other side of the room.)**

Agnes: **(Lifting her arms as she chants)** Ubi est thesaurus tuus, ibi est et cor tuum etiam!

(George wiggles the portrait. LFX: The lights flicker. Miles looks astounded and shocked.)

Miles: Good *grief!*

George: Aha! That's more like it!

(Millie delicately faints behind him. They all notice her as she slides to the floor with a sigh. Emily jumps to her feet.)

Miles: Mother!

(LFX: Lights fade to black out. Curtain closes.)

End of Act 1.

Act 2

Scene 1 – Drawing Room

Emily: (Offstage) Well, thanks again for coming and picking me up.

(Enter Emily and Miles from stage left.)

Miles: Not at all. Mother adores that little art shop in Duffham and besides, I couldn't have you dragging yourself out here by bus, it's too far.

Emily: I should have my car again by Tuesday.

Miles: It's really no problem, Emily. In fact, (swallowing and looking a little nervous) I was wondering if you'd like to take a little detour on the way home? Have you seen the White Horse at Duffington?

Emily: Is that a pub?

Miles: Actually, yes, there *is* a pub in Duffington called the White Horse, which does splendid cream teas incidentally, but no, I was thinking of the hill carving. I thought maybe we could go and see it later this afternoon? They have it all cleared and open to the public this month. It's rumoured to date back to 800 BC.

Emily: Thank you, I'd love to go, Lord Miles. And if you'd like to share one, I'm quite partial to a cream tea too, on occasions.

Miles: Really? Me too. And let's forget the 'lord' bit, shall we? I'd very much like us to be ... friends, Emily.

Emily: That would be nice.

(They smile, shyly at each other for a moment.)

Miles: Oh, right. I'll go and collect Aunt Agnes from her rooms. Are you okay here a moment?

Emily: Fine.

Miles: Right. Okay. Back in a jiffy. (*He leaves stage right, smiling all the time.*)

Emily: It looks like I have a date with a baron later this afternoon. (*Giggles*) What is happening to my life? Ghosts, barons, treasure? It's mad. Mad.

(Enter George from out of the book case. He is wearing a fluffy dressing gown and slippers, he has a sleep mask stuck to his forehead and is holding a fabric bag of ice to the top of his head.)

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Emily: Talking of mad... Where have you been, Lord George? You made your point with Miles and Lady Elyngeham - but then you just disappeared!

George: Well, all that dramatic stuff takes it out of a chap. I had to go and have a lie down afterwards.

Emily: For five days? Really? Meanwhile, we've been wracking our brains to work out where the Blethersby dagger could be hidden.

George: Five days, was it? Oh, time doesn't quite work the same on my side. You worked it out then, I knew you would. You're a clever girl.

Emily: I don't feel very clever at the moment because we're stuck! Miles and I have been over the whole house this week, from top to bottom! Aunt Agnes even showed us two new secret panels, but we've not turned up anything, not even a clue.

George: I have faith in you, m'girl. Where's your inner Nancy Drew?

Emily: My inner Nancy Who? Come on, Lord George. Is there anything you could tell us that would help us? Any clues from the other side? Or was it you? Did you take the dagger in the first place?

(George begins to walk stage left towards the door, holding the ice bag to his head.)

George: Oh, I'm feeling a little faint again ... You want a clue? Hmmm. Maybe you need a clearer picture of me.

Emily: What? Lord George? George!

George: Oh, I'm fading, I'm fading...

(The door stage left opens and he exits. The door closes behind him.)

Emily: He has a definite taste for the theatrics, that one.

(Enter Miles stage right balancing a tea tray with Aunt Agnes holding on to his arm. Emily rushes over and offers her arm to Agnes and leads her to her chair. Miles follows and puts the tea tray on the table. Agnes settles into her chair.)

Agnes: You can pour my tea, Miles. I don't like it too strong.

(Enter Millie from stage left.)

Millie: Sorry, sorry, I was putting away my art supplies and I just had to have a tinsey play with my new brushes.

(Millie sits down stage on the sofa.)

Agnes: **(To Miles)** Pour a cup each for the others, then you can top up the pot.

Millie: I wish we still had a butler. **(Leaning towards Agnes)** You really shouldn't order Miles around so, dear, not now he's the baron.

Agnes: He may be the baron, but I'm the matriarch!

Emily: I can pour the tea.

(While Agnes is speaking, Miles offers tea to Millie, who signals to Miles that she doesn't want any. He pours himself a cup.)

Agnes: Don't be silly, you're a guest. No, you're right, Millie, it hasn't been the same since Havers retired. Why don't you get another butler, Miles? That Amanda person you have as a 'personal assistant' is just a glorified secretary. And I'm a little worried about the personal part and exactly what she wants to assist you with.

Miles: I am already considering a personnel change, Aunty.

Emily **(To Miles)** Did you really have a real-life butler?

Miles: **(He nods)** Hmmm. We inherited him from the very first baron, I think; he must have been as old as the house!

Millie: Oh, Miles, he wasn't that old! And he couldn't help that little tremor he had.

Miles: Let's just say I've been pouring the tea for a few years.

Agnes: Right, let's get on with it. I don't want to die before we get this sorted.

(Miles is a gentleman and indicates that Emily can have the upstage end of the sofa, she smiles and sits in the middle and then indicates he should sit next to her. More smiles from Miles!)

Millie: Besides, I'm going to visit a sculpture gallery with Patricia Fitzpartridge and Delia Chombottomly-Smythe today at five. **(To Emily)** They've got this new exhibition, which has received rave reviews, called 'Au Natural'. It has nudes all made from natural or recycled materials...

Agnes: Right! **(Banging the arm of her chair)** I've called this family action meeting to coordinate our efforts to find George's treasure.

Millie: It's all rather thrilling, isn't it; ghosts and treasure and all? You know, Emily, I've always felt somewhat of a presence here in the house.

Agnes: George has been keeping pretty shtum after proving his existence to you two...

Emily: Actually, he popped in just now when Miles went to get you. It seems he's had to regain his energy after all the dramatics last week.

Miles: Really? Did he say anything helpful?

Millie: You don't think he, well ... pries, do you? **(She fiddles nervously with the top of her dress/blouse)** You know, in other areas of the house?

Emily: Oh, no, no, Lady Elyngeham, I shouldn't think so. I've always found him to be a true old gentleman.

Agnes: **(Aside to Emily)** Best not mention the nudity, then.

Miles: The *What?*

Emily: He's a little *eccentric*, shall we say?

Agnes: He's off his tooting rocker.

Millie: **(Oblivious to the conversation between the others)** Oh. Oh, that's alright, then. A gentleman ghost is rather lovely, don't you think? We could include him in the brochure.

Miles: Besides, mother, you don't need to worry about anything untoward; it was rumoured that he ... um... batted for the other team, you know?

Millie: Oxford or Cambridge? Although I'm not sure what cricket has to do with anything. **(To Emily)** I never could follow cricket. Now horse riding I love, especially gymkhana and dressage; all so pretty! Poetry in motion. And all the men in those lovely, tight jodhpurs and smart little jackets, riding around and around, bobbing up and down. Ah! Poetry. In. Motion. **(She is obviously sensuously enraptured at the idea.)**

Miles: Never mind, mother. So did George give us any clues? I'm feeling rather stumped by it all. Are you sure it's the Blethersby Dagger that we're after?

Emily: Yes, George confirmed it.

Millie: Well, it makes sense, after all. It was passed from generation to generation of barons since being presented to the very first Baron Blethersby by the king!

Miles: **(To Emily, sharing the joke)** I name you Baron Blethersby. Here, have a dagger, and a free butler called Havers.

Agnes: That's all well and good, but it doesn't help us find the thing!

Emily: Lord George did say something else, a bit odd...

Agnes: So not out of character then.

Emily: He said that maybe we needed a clearer picture of him.

Millie: Oh... Oh! The other team, I see.
(Miles offers her a brief acknowledging salute with his tea cup.)

Millie: Well, I never. How very ... **(She searches for the word)** bohemian of him!

Agnes: **(Tuts and rolls her eyes)** That's a lot of old rot. Just because a gentleman remains unmarried, it doesn't make him gay.

Millie: Was there anyone special in his life? Maybe it would help with this clearer picture thingy.

Agnes: I remember a few gels, but that was before the war, and certainly no gentlemen friends like that. There was one lady friend, a Mrs Iris Derrum; divorced, but very well to do. They would go to the theatre together, but that was when he was in his fifties and the dagger had been missing for years before that.

Millie: What about hobbies, interests?

Agnes: (A pause while she tries to remember) Oh, my poor memory!

Emily: What if ... what if he didn't mean figuratively but literally? What if he means that we *literally* need a picture of him?

Miles: What, a picture as in a portrait?

Emily: Exactly! Or a photo.

Millie: He's in the family portrait, there.

(Miles and Emily go over to it and look)

Miles: But what are we looking for, some kind of clue? I must have looked at this painting a thousand times.

Emily: Are there any more? Any of just him?

Millie: (Jumping to her feet) There is the official one, of when he received the barony; he's wearing all his robes. It's in the portrait gallery; let me look at that one.

(She quickly moves to the door, stage left, and squeezes Emily's arm)

Millie: How exciting! How thrilling! It's like a real-life treasure hunt. (She exits)

(Emily and Miles move back stage centre)

Emily: What about any photos? You know, family albums and that sort of thing.

Agnes: I have lots of my own photos. (She thinks for a second) Ooh! I have a photo of George in my rooms, the one in the silver frame, Miles. It's just of George smiling at the camera, but I remember now that he left it to me in his will! Do you know the one? It's on my bookcase.

Miles: Yes, I do. You stay there, and I'll get it for you.

(Miles rushes out stage right and Emily drifts back to Aunt Agnes stage centre.)

Agnes: He's a good boy, really.

Emily: Yes, he is.

(Agnes looks at her and smiles to herself. Enter Millie in a rush, stage left.)

Millie: It's screwed ... (A little out of breath)

Agnes: I beg your pardon?

Millie: It's screwed to the wall. I couldn't get it down.

Agnes: It's nearly 2 metres tall, Millie!

Millie: Well, there is that too. And rather heavy. I stood on a chair and had a good look at it, though, but then a tour party came in and I had to run for it. I escaped through the gift

shop. I was terrible sneaky, you'd be so proud of me, Emily. **(She looks very pleased with herself.)**

Emily: Charlie's Angels couldn't have done it better.

Millie: Oh! Charlie's Angels!

(Millie glows at the compliment and poses like a Charlie's Angel, Agnes rolls her eyes. Enter Miles from stage right holding the photo in the silver frame.)

Miles: I've got it!

(Miles puts it on the table near to Agnes. He kneels down behind the table while Emily and Millie stand behind him. They all look at the photo for a moment)

Emily: What do you think, Aunt Agnes?

(Agnes picks up/is handed the photo.)

Agnes: It was taken on a holiday to Corfu. I took it; I remember George laughing because it was in the gardens of the Palace of St Michael and St *George*. But that's it, nothing more.

Miles: But he specifically left it to you in his will?

Agnes: Yes, he joked it was one of the few photos where he looked handsome. He didn't like his photo taken much.

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Millie: It doesn't exactly tell us anything new about him, though, does it?

(Agnes turns the photo frame over in her hands)

Agnes: No, I suppose it doesn't. The frame is nothing special either. It's pretty, and it is nice quality, but I think George just bought it from a local shop.

Emily: Aunt Agnes, have you ever opened the frame?

Agnes: No, I don't think I have. I haven't needed to.

Miles: **(Glancing at Emily)** I think you should, Auntie.

Agnes: I suppose so ... **(She tries to open the frame)** Oh, you do it, Miles. The catch is too fiddly for me.

(Miles opens the frame and takes out the photograph. As he does so, a piece of paper falls onto the table. He picks it up to look at it)

Agnes: I didn't know *that* was in there.

Millie: What is it, Miles? Is it a secret?

Miles: It's a drawing of something, I think. Like a diagram.

Emily: **(Looking over his shoulder)** It looks like furniture ... it's a big desk. **(She takes the paper and rotates it the right way up and gives it back to him)**

Millie: **(Ever so excited)** Look! There is a little key taped to the inside of the backing. A secret key! Oh, how thrilling. **(To Emily)** It really is like Charlie's Angels!

Miles: Or Scooby-Doo. **(He hands the paper to Agnes. He takes the key off the back of the photo frame.)** It's rather a small key.

Millie: The perfect size for a desk drawer though; your father had drawers like that in his desk. It's in the study.

(Millie starts towards the door stage left.)

Agnes: Hold your horses. Before you all go racing off, this doesn't look like the desk in the study. This one has got a back on it. **(She hands the paper back to Miles.)**

Emily: Are there any desks in the house like this?

Miles: I don't think so. **(He stands and shows Emily the paper.)** This is a big desk, look it's got drawers down both sides.

Emily: What's that part of the diagram there? That isn't a drawer, but it's been circled.

(Millie comes over to look)

Millie: It's a secret compartment!

Agnes: Good grief, Millie, give it rest with the secret this and the secret that.

Miles: Actually, I think mother's right. Look, this part is in the side of the desk but on the inside where a person sits.

Millie: Think, Miles! What other desks do we have?

(Miles crosses and sits on the sofa)

Agnes: I can't think of any desks in the house that have a backing on. Can you?

Miles: No, no I can't.

Emily: What if it's not here at Bletheringham Place? Surely George had his own house at some point?

Agnes: Well, yes... He had a house near the university while he was a professor there, but his things were all moved in here when he came back.

Emily: What about at the university? He was a pretty big noise there for a while.

Agnes: He had an office! I remember visiting him there; a big wooden panelled one when he was the dean.

Miles: Do you remember the desk?

Agnes: Yes, it was a big wooden one with a leather top and polished wood. Beautiful it was.

Miles: **(To Emily)** Is there any chance it could still be in the university? If we tracked it down, could you get to it and look it over?

Emily: Not really, my building is on a different campus - I'm science, he was ancient languages. I wouldn't have any reason to be in the buildings. **(Sitting on the sofa and tapping on her phone)** But I looked him up after he started pestering me. It turns out that Duffham University is rather proud of him; he was famous as an academic in his own right and then he went and became a baron. He was a bit of a celebrity in his time. The Elyngeham wing of the library is named after him.

Millie: Do you think the desk could be there? In the library?

Emily: Nope. Look at this. **(She shows the phone to Miles)** My money would be on that: they have his office set aside as a mini-museum to him! There's a picture of it on the website.

Miles: What do you think, Aunty?

(He gets up, and hands the phone over to Agnes so she can look)

Agnes: Well, I'll be. It could be the desk; we can't see all of it in this photo.

(Agnes hands Miles back the phone, who passes it to Emily.)

Emily: The problem is it's not open to the public except on special open days.

Millie: Oh, we were so close! What if we asked ever so nicely?

Agnes: It might not be open to the public, but what if the ancient Right Honourable Miss Elyngeham wanted to see her brother's office **(dramatically)** one last time before she died?

Millie: And if the current *Lord* Blethersby was to call and visit the university with her?

Emily: Could you swing it, do you think?

Miles: I can jolly well try! I'll call the university myself and make an appointment; I don't want Amanda doing this. Excuse me, I prefer to call from my office. **(He stands, moves away, and then turns to Emily)** Don't go anywhere.

(They smile at each other. He exits stage left)

Agnes: **(Rubbing her hands together and giving a little evil laugh)** Call Katrina, Millie. I want a shampoo and set before we rock and roll.

Millie: Oh, how completely and utterly thrilling! **(She exits stage right)**

(Lights down)

Scene 2 – Faculty Rooms

(The faculty rooms at the university. There is a big wooden desk stage centre, which has a back on so you cannot see under it, a wooden desk chair, bookcases which include framed newspaper cuttings or display boards illustrating George's achievements. To one side of the desk, on the wall, is a portrait or photo of George in his university robes. Enter from stage right Chancellor, followed by Agnes on the arm of Miles, and finally Emily who is carrying a backpack.)

Chancellor: (Putting a bunch of keys in his pocket) I apologise if it's a bit fusty, it's been locked since the last open day. We are very proud of Lord George Blethersby, Miss Elyngeham. Your brother was a pillar of the academic world in his day and made an impressive contribution here at Duffham University. We are proud to honour his memory.

Agnes: (Playing at being a doddering old lady) I'm not long for this world now, and I wanted to see this one last time. Oh, my dear, dear brother. His office isn't quite as I remember it, though.

Chancellor: This isn't his original office, as that now belongs to the current department dean. But we tried as best we could to recreate it here.

Agnes: You have his desk! I remember his desk as clear as day.

Chancellor: Yes, it is a beauty. (To Miles) I wouldn't have minded it in my own offices but it was bequeathed to the university in his will, with the stipulation that was to be preserved as-is for your family.

Miles: Really? Now, isn't that interesting. (To Emily and Agnes)

Chancellor: I'm sure that such a proficient scholar felt for his desk what a captain must feel for his ship. It is from here his mind travelled to distant shores and distant times...

Agnes: Oh, I can see him looking at me from his portrait. It's such a kindness, Chancellor Hardcastle, you letting me see this room. I miss him terribly, even after all this time. (She sniffs a little as if moved to tears) Oh, I feel quite moved. Emily, dear, pass me a hanky.

(Emily dives into her bag and passes Agnes a hanky, who dabs at her eyes)

Agnes: I feel so close to him. It's as if his presence is here with us.

Miles: (Aside to Emily) He isn't, is he? ... Here...?

(Emily shakes her head)

Agnes: I can still see him sitting here, pen in hand, pouring over those old manuscripts and books. The desk looks so empty now, as you say, Chancellor Hardcastle, like a ship without its captain. Oh, my dear brother! Oh, I can't breathe ... Oh, I've got tinglings and fizzings running all over me ... My heart, my heart is swimming and my head is racing. Oh, get my pills, Miles, dear, I need my pills, they're in my bag. (She leans heavily on the desk, stage left.)

Chancellor: Is she alright? Miss Elyngeham, can I be of any help?

Agnes: I suffer from these turns, oh, how I suffer... Miles, dear, my pills, quickly, quickly now.

(She swings her bag at Miles, who, catching the bag and on to what Agnes is doing, begins to look through it for her pill bottle.)

Miles: Yes, she has these...funny turns.

Chancellor: I'm sorry to see you so distressed, Miss Elyngeham.

(Agnes continues to have her funny turn while Miles finds her pills in her bag. Emily passes her a bottle of water from her backpack. Agnes takes the pill, all very dramatically, while being fussed over by the others.)

Miles: They don't usually take long to work.

Emily: Miss Elyngeham, do you need some air? Or somewhere quiet to sit down?

Agnes: Oh, yes, yes, I do. **(Pulling at the Chancellor's sleeve, laying the little ol' lady act on thick)** Do you, do you have somewhere quiet I could recover, away from here? It's all so overwhelming.

Chancellor: My personal offices are not far, I'm sure we can make you more comfortable there.

Miles: Thank you so much, Chancellor Hardcastle, I really do appreciate it. At her time of life, she is more delicate than she realises.

Agnes: **(Once again, pulling at the chancellor's sleeve)** And you don't happen to have something a little stronger than water, do you? **(Wiggling the bottle of water.)**

Chancellor: I'm sure my secretary can fetch us some coffee.

Agnes: **(Agnes gives him a hard, meaningful look)** For medicinal purposes, of course?

Chancellor: Actually, I have a little something in my desk; for medicinal purposes, of course. **(Winks at Agnes)**

Agnes: I knew I liked you. Right, children, I'm going with nice Professor Hardcastle to recover in his office. Goodbye, dear George. **(She waves her arm as she talks, and the pills go flying behind the desk)** Oh, my pills! Where have they gone? Oh, I feel such a silly old woman.

Emily: Don't worry, Miss Elyngeham, I'll find them for you.

Agnes: You're a good girl, Emily. **(To the Chancellor)** Is she a good student? She seems quite bright...

(Agnes leans heavily on the arm of the Chancellor and steers him off stage right. As she leaves, she either gives Emily a heavy wink or a secret 'thumbs-up'.)

Agnes: Oh, my legs are still a little wobbly, it leaves my heart all fluttery too.

Chancellor: Right this way, Miss Elyngeham. Lord Blethersby, are you coming with us?

(Miles looks torn for a second, obviously wanting to stay and help search. Emily gives him a tiny nod.)

Miles: Certainly. I want to see she is alright. Don't worry, aunty, we'll soon have you feeling better.

(Agnes and Chancellor, followed by Miles, exit stage right. When they have gone, Emily gets the paper out of her pocket or bag and looks at it again, with the key. Quickly moving to the desk she picks up the pills, pockets them, then looks for the secret compartment under the desk.)

Emily: Right, it should be under here, round this side...

(Enter George stage left, wearing a kilt, big boots, and a tie.)

George: What, ho! I knew you'd crack it.

Emily: **(Banging her head under the desk)** Ow! Is that you Lord George? **(She pokes her head out.)** What are you wearing?

George: It's a kilt! It seemed appropriate as we were going into battle! Tally ho! Turrum Tarrah; mysteries to be solved, treasure to be found!

Emily: Hardly. And the tie is because you're back at work, I suppose?

George: Spot on. It's university colours, don't you know.

Emily: Got bats in the belfry, that one. **(She puts her head back under the desk.)**

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George: **(Wandering around the office)** My real office was lovely; this isn't much more than a broom cupboard they've shoved all my stuff in. Mine had a good view of the quad and some beautiful bookcases. Ah, I see they've included that manuscript I translated. It caused quite a stir; Tolkien and I shared many a pint discussing that one! It seems funny to see everything reduced to this. Still, it's nice to be remembered though. I suppose. **(Ends up stage left)** How are you getting on under there?

Emily: Why didn't you tell me in the first place where it was, *and* what I was looking for, for that matter?

George: That wouldn't have been half as much fun, now would it?

(Enter Miles, quickly and quietly from stage right.)

George: And you wouldn't have had the pleasure of meeting my lovely family.

Miles: Emily? Are you here?

Emily: **(Banging her head a second time)** Oooh! Yes, I'm here, under the desk. **(She pops her head out again.)**

Miles: Any luck? Is the treasure under the desk?

George: It is indeed. **(Looking rather pleased with himself, he saunters off stage left.)**

Emily: **(Back under the desk)** Yes, it is, but the compartment is bit tricky to open. Got it!

(Emily crawls out from behind the desk with a wooden box and old envelope. Miles drops to his knees to see the box and to help her. Emily is stage centre, Miles stage left of her.)

Emily: The small compartment sat flush behind the drawers. If you weren't looking, the keyhole looked just like a knot in the wood. **(She looks over to where George had been)** Oh, he's gone again.

Miles: Who? **(Looking around)**

Emily: Lordy George. He popped in to make sure we were on the right track. I can't believe we've got it! There's a box and an old-looking envelope.

Miles: You really are a remarkable person, Emily Richards! You find secrets and talk to ghosts from the past, and quite revolutionise the present with all your energy and ideas.

Emily: I don't know about that. **(She puts the wooden box in her bag.)**

Miles: I'm serious, Emily. I'd had some good ideas for the estate, but you've come along and brought them to life. And I think you've done the same for me; when I'm with you, I feel like all of me is finally alive.

Emily: Like spring and summer have come at once.

Miles: Maybe you really are a little blue-haired fairy.

Emily: **(Breaks eye contact)** Miles, I'm not anyone special; I'm just an eco-geek from a small country town...

Miles: With her head in the trees and her hands in the earth; who hears voices from the past and sees promise and life in the future!

Emily: You're poetic all of a sudden.

Miles: Maybe it's because you bring it out of me, Emily.

(They look at each other for a moment; it's obvious that Miles is thinking of kissing her)

Miles: May I?

(Emily nods, and he gently kisses her, once. They part, smile at each other, and Emily grabs him around the neck and pulls him in for a longer kiss. They part and Emily turns as the Chancellor enters.)

Chancellor: Did you find them?

Miles: Yes. We found what we were looking for. **(Looking only at Emily.)**

(Emily holds up the bottle of pills while making sure her bag and the box are hidden from the chancellor. Miles stands, and helps Emily to her feet.)

Chancellor: What a relief. Miss Elyngeham is feeling a little better now, but I don't want to leave her alone for too long. I was anxious in case she needed her pills again. Now, before you leave, Lord Blethersby, I'd like to introduce you to Dean Professor Ellins, who you'll be liaising with in regards to the students for the Wilding project at Bletheringham Park.

Miles: Yes, of course. Lead on, Chancellor Hardcastle. I'm sure my aunt will be anxious to know we've found her tablets.

(Emily and Miles share a quick look behind the chancellor's back. Chancellor leads them off stage right. Before leaving, Emily pauses and takes a last glance at the room.)

Emily: You'll be remembered, George. Don't worry. **(Exits stage right.)**

(LFX: Lights down)

Scene 3 – Drawing Room

(The drawing-room. Enter stage left Miles, Emily, Agnes, followed by Millie. Agnes sits in the chair stage left, the others crowd more stage right around the coffee table. Emily sits on the edge of the sofa stage right, and places the chest and envelope on the table.)

Agnes: Oh, what a wheeze. I haven't had that much fun in ages.

Miles: You deserve an Oscar, Aunty!

Millie: What do you mean, Miles? What happened?

Agnes: I had one of my funny turns...

Millie: You don't have funny turns, Agnes dear.

Agnes: Oh, I came over all peculiar. **(Laughs wickedly.)**

Miles: The chancellor had to take her out. You should have seen her, mother!

Agnes: Thank you, thank you. No autographs, just a gin and tonic.

Millie: Oh, how exciting! What did you find?

Emily: There was an old envelope and this box.

Miles: We opened the envelope in the car on the way home, Aunt Agnes couldn't wait.

Agnes: I wasn't the only one!

Miles: It had a small key in it, nothing else. We think it fits the chest.

Agnes: Get the key, girl, and open it. I'm too old to be waiting around like this. Anything could happen with all this excitement.

Millie: Yes, do open it, Emily. I'm just dying to see what's inside. Could it be the Blethersby Dagger, do you think?

(Emily takes out the key and opens the chest with the others gathered around behind the coffee table with their backs to the fireplace. Emily opens the box and gently takes out a package rolled in paper. She unrolls the papers and takes out an antique dagger. She reverently hands it to Miles, who shows his mother, and finally, they pass it to Agnes.)

Miles: Is it the Blethersby Dagger, Aunt Agnes?

Agnes: It is indeed, Miles.

(While Millie is talking, Emily notices the papers)

Millie: After all these years! The Blethersby Dagger has been returned to the family. Miles, this means we must a proper presentation ceremony for you like every generation before you. Well, bar George and Donald of course. How auspicious to be standing in tradition's footsteps, holding what each Baron before has held...

Emily: Um... These papers, they're not just packing. Look, there's a marriage certificate and a birth certificate.

Miles: What?

Emily: **(Reading)** This is a marriage certificate for Lord George Arthur Elyngeham and Miss Emily Marie Richards. Baron George was married!

Miles: The famous bachelor baron was secretly married? Seriously?

Emily: He took her name, though, look. Afterwards, he became George Elyngeham–Richards and she remained Emily Richards. That was very unconventional.

(Emily hands him the certificate.)

Agnes: I remember Emily Richards now! She was his housekeeper; a lovely, lovely lady. Well, blow me down with a feather. Married!

Emily: And this is a birth certificate for James Henry Richards, child of George Elyngeham-Richards and Emily Richards.

Miles: They had a son?

(There is a moment of shocked silence.)

Agnes: **(Quietly)** What was your grandfather's name, Emily?

Miles: Your name is Emily Richards.

Emily: Grandfather Jack? ...Um... Yes. They read his name out as James at the funeral, I remember thinking it was strange as we'd always called him Grandfather Jack.

Miles: James...

Millie: What does this mean, Miles?

(Miles moves stage right as he's thinking.)

Millie: Does this mean you're family? Oh, how wonderful. **(She pulls Emily to her feet and hugs her)** Isn't it, Miles? I suppose this means that you and Miles are third cousins or second cousins once removed or something like that, which is it, Miles? You know all about this sort of thing.

Miles: So George and Emily had James. What was your father's name? Did he have any brothers or sisters?

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Emily: Um... There was my dad, er John, and his sister Fiona,

Agnes: Wait for it.

Millie: Wait for what, dear?

Emily: And now there's just mum, me and my sister Laura.

Miles: Bugger.

Agnes: There it is.

Millie: There what is? She is family, isn't she? We've found her. Oh, we must have a party! We can do the dagger ceremony and welcome you and your sister at the same time, it will be so wonderful! We can open up the big dining room again, or a have summer ball, oh, a summer ball, think of it!

Agnes: The Rule of Writ.

Miles: Bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger, bugger!

Millie: **(Shocked.)** Miles! I'm so sorry, Emily, dear. Miles never swears. The last time I heard him swear he was 12 years old and a horse had trodden on his foot. I don't know what has gotten into him

Miles: Mother, think about it: if George had a son, then the Barony should never have passed to his brother, great Grandfather Donald.

Millie: Oh! Oh, I suppose not, no.

Miles: He should never have been the baron ... Therefore, I shouldn't be the baron now!

Millie: Oh! Oh, Miles! But ... is your father in good health, Emily?

Emily: Dad died when I was seventeen; in a car accident.

Agnes: The rule of Writ.

Emily: What's this rule of Writ? Is it something terrible? Does Miles have to fight someone in a duel or something?

Miles: There's no need for that; it's all very clear!

Agnes: A few ancient baronies, like that of Blethersby, are baronies by writ, which pre-dates peerage by patent. They allow the title to pass to a female heir should the baron not have a son.

Millie: That's right, there's that lovely painting of Baroness Elenore on the front staircase. A feisty lady! It has some beautiful brushwork and intricate detail on the...

Miles: She can't have the barony, Aunt Agnes. She's got blue hair!

Emily: It's just a streak. And you said you liked it.

Miles: Well, I don't.

Emily: And what do you mean about having the barony? Aunt Agnes?

Miles: **(Quietly.)** Bugger it all. **(Marches off stage left.)**

Millie: Oh! Your family line ... Not Miles. Miles! Miles? Miles, dear... **(Millie runs after Miles stage left.)**

(Emily sits back down on the sofa, there is a moment of silence as the news sinks in.)

Emily: We were just looking for the dagger. For George.

Agnes: I know.

Emily: He wanted his treasure restored so he could finally be at peace.

Agnes: I know, dear. That's true. Although I think I'll be having a word with ol' George.

Emily: **(Pause.)** Aunt Agnes, I honestly didn't have the slightest inkling of any of this other stuff.

Agnes: I know, dear.

Emily: It can't be right, can it? What you and Miles were saying...

(Enter Miles, stage left, to stand over Emily, behind the coffee table.)

Miles: You *knew*! You knew all about this, didn't you! You told us you were researching your family to begin with, then you fed us all that old guff about seeing his ghost...I can't believe we were taken in by this sham! You duped an old lady; don't you have any shame? Then you helped me, made me like you, maybe even lo ... **(he chokes on it)** It's all utterly humiliating, utterly brilliant on your part, and utterly cruel! What kind of person does that?

Agnes: *Miles!*

Emily: **(Quiet, looking shocked and vulnerable)** I think I'll go now, Aunt Agnes. I'm pleased that you've got your dagger back. Everything else seems a bit overwhelming at the moment...I think it's best if I go.

(Emily quickly picks up her bag, gets up, passes in front of the coffee table, and leaves stage left. Agnes reaches out to her as she passes her chair. Miles moves far right. There is a moment of silence after she has left.)

Miles: Don't say anything, please, Aunt Agnes.

(Instead, Agnes gets up out of her chair and goes over to comfort Miles by hugging his back)

Miles: I feel like I suddenly gained everything, then lost everything ... I've lost everything.

Agnes: You have now. She just left.

Miles: I'm going to walk the dogs. Or see to the horses. Or something.

(Miles exits stage right. Agnes sighs after he's gone. After a slight pause, George, in high spirits, appears through the bookcase, still wearing the kilt.)

George: What a lark! I knew she'd come through for me and find it. And what a performance you pulled off, eh, Aggie?

Agnes: (**Worried and sad.**) We've had quite a performance gone on here, George.

(**She walks across back to her chair and sits. George sees the chest open and the things on the coffee table.**)

George: Oh. You didn't wait for me before the grand opening then?

Agnes: No! We didn't. You weren't around. You were off gallivanting in the spirit realm again I suppose!

George: Well, I was just leaving the university when I bumped into...

Agnes: I don't care, George, who you bumped into - even if it was Mary Queen of Scots!

George: Hairy Mary? I should hope not, she's got a filthy temper

Agnes: (**Quietly.**) You should have been here, George. It was important. You knew full well what was in that chest, didn't you?

George: (**He sits on the sofa, chagrined.**) Yes. Yes, I did.

Agnes: You never really gave a rat's arse about tradition. I've been wondering all along what you were really up to. Returning the family treasure - the lost Blethersby Dagger - so you can rest in peace? It never rang true to me. Little Emily doesn't know you like I do.

George: You were always the sharpest of the bunch, Aggie.

Agnes: I had more balls than you and dreamy Donald put together! ... So?

George: I wanted to return the lost treasure...

Agnes: But it was never the dagger, was it? Little Emily was your lost treasure.

George: Am I that transparent?

Agnes: Yes. Even before you were a ghost!

George: My greatest treasure was always my Emily. Always. (**He stands and moves over to look at the portrait.**) Oh, Father would have none of her! Some lowly, grubby nurse I'd picked up in a hospital in Kent after the war; she was hardly what he wanted for his heir or for the precious Blethersby line! He was impossible to reason with. He was brutal.

Agnes: I remember the rows. Were they about you and Emily?

George: They were. (**He moves back to lean on the fireplace stage centre.**) She wasn't here then, of course, she was still working as a nurse in Kent. She had so much goodness all wrapped up in a smile. Oh, I loved her! And for some reason she loved me back.

Agnes: So you kept her a secret?

George: And once I realised that I would get nowhere with him, I left.

Agnes: I remember, George.

George: **(He moves to the bookcase, stage right of the fireplace, skims the books while talking at first.)** I immersed myself in the academic world of Duffham and became a professor - and a darn good one at that! Then, I convinced my darling Emily to away with me to Gretna Green, and I married her. In 1946 there were war widows a-plenty, so I passed her off as one and installed her as my housekeeper at Duffham.

Agnes: How did you pass off a pregnancy?

George: A prolonged stay with her sister on her farm in Ashton Magna...

Agnes: Where our little Emily is from.

George: Hmm, then she brought James back home; again claiming the tragedy of war to hide the truth. We drew up some fake adoption papers but people asked surprisingly few questions. What was another unwanted baby? And what a kind woman Mrs Richards was to take him in, poor little blighter.

Agnes: Where did you see it all going? You were happy, I saw that myself, and your Emily was a treasure. But how did you see it ending, George?

George: **(He moves to lean on the back of the sofa.)** Oh, happily ever after, of course. I had a plan, I think, to 'marry' my housekeeper once I became the Baron. Meanwhile, I was blissfully happy, the happiest I've ever been in my life. I had my studies and my precious little family. **(Pause.)** I just didn't see what was coming next.

Agnes: Father's death?

George: Yes. The old goat suddenly died and I ended up as the baron of a giant mess. It took me years to straighten it all out here. I thought I'd just get it straight and then I could bring Emily and Jack here for good.

Agnes: But she became ill.

George: **(He moves round and sits on the sofa.)** She did. And the beautiful, kind, wonderful, light of my life went out. I was devastated. When Rebecca, Emily's sister, offered to take James to the farm, it seemed it would be best for him. He was 7 years old and his mother was gone and his father was a wreck. And that was that.

Agnes: You did what was best for the boy.

George: I hoped I had. I set up the trust fund at the university, with my private money, so he and anyone in his family could study there. His son John did and I watched over him. Then nothing until I found little Emily among the books in the library. And I saw it: my Emily's heart, with my intelligence and enquiring mind, all wrapped up in a streak of colour and bluster.

Agnes: I like her.

George: You would.

Agnes: Why do you say that?

George: She also reminded me of you! She has that impish spark in her eyes.

Agnes: **(Laughing.)** That she does! But what now, big brother? It has hit the fan here, good and proper. I know you imagined some teary embrace as the long-lost great-granddaughter returns to the family bosom, but you've gone and ballsed it right up.

George: How so? How can my Emily be rejected again? I don't believe it; weren't they happy she is one of us?

Agnes: She's more than that though, isn't she, Right Honorable Lord George Elyngeham-Richards, *Baron Blethersby*? She's your surviving heir!

George: **(He slaps his forehead.)** Oh, ruddy Nora! How did I miss that? The rule of Writ!

Agnes: Indeed, you old fool. The rule of Writ.

(LFX: Lights to off)

Scene 4 – Drawing Room

(Enter Miles from stage right. He is in no hurry and has his phone in his hand. He looks at the phone, scrolls, pauses as if to press something, but then doesn't. He sighs in frustration and sits in the chair to the right of the fireplace, placing the phone on the table next to him, pushing it away from himself. He sits back as if to relax, his hands steepled together, but his leg bouncing up and down with nervous energy. He looks again towards the phone.)

Miles: Oh, this is ridiculous.

(Miles snatches up the phone and repeats the scroll and the pause. He sits back in the chair again, staring at the screen. Enter Agnes from stage right.)

Agnes: You've not called Emily yet, then?

Miles: No. What makes you think I was going to call her? I could have been checking my emails?

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Agnes: But you weren't.

Miles: No. I get as far as getting my phone, getting her number there on the screen, and then - Pff! That's it. I stall.

Agnes: It's been two weeks, Miles! Two weeks since she walked out of that door. Two weeks since everything changed. You can't just sit there fidgeting. I thought you loved her?

Miles: I do, I did. I don't know. What would I say to her anyway? (Morosely.) Maybe we should just leave it to the lawyers.

Agnes: You can start by being honest with yourself and then her.

Miles: Just leave it, Aunt Agnes. What do you know about love anyway?

Agnes: What? Do you think because I never married I don't know anything about love? I know more about it than most. I've played with playboys and dallied with dukes, I even jived with an American GI. I've painted the town every shade of red, my boy. (She crosses to her chair and sits.) But before all that, my heart and my soul were left in Monte Carlo in 1948. Have you ever heard of Julien Fontaine de Avigne?

Miles: No, I don't ... (Sitting up a bit straighter, interested despite himself.) Wait, he was an adventurer of sorts, wasn't he? You've got a framed newspaper cutting in your rooms.

Agnes: Race driver, pilot, balloonist, entrepreneur extraordinaire: the son of a count. Julien was as rich and clever as he was handsome.

Miles: And you loved him.

Agnes: And I loved him. And he loved me. Deeply. Passionately. But he had one of those unhappy French marriages that were so fashionable at the time, and despite our deep love for one another, there were his children and his duty to his family to consider. And so I left. I would not share him. I would not be his mistress; a waiting-woman to have grabbed scraps of his time and his love, and cold nights in a pretty dress without him. Nor would I cause those beautiful children so much pain; because he would have left it all behind for me, you know, but it would have torn his heart in two. So, I loved, and I left because of love. Oh, don't look so sad, my boy, I've had my fun since then. But no man ever really measured up to Julien.

Miles: Aunt Agnes, I... **(Miles walks over to her and hugs her.)**

Agnes: There now. **(Grasping his hands.)** So take courage, Miles. I know love when I see it. I know a meeting of souls when it shines so brightly. Don't let her slip away from you. Live and love gloriously when you find such a person as Emily.

Miles: I've never met anyone like her; she makes me feel energised and alive, and safe at home, all at the same time.

Agnes: She completes you. And she needs you.

Miles: **(He sits on the floor next to her chair.)** But honestly, what have I got to offer her? I don't even have the barony now. What work opportunities are there for ex-barons out there? She's smart, she's clever, she's so many things! Honestly, Aunty, what does she need me for? Without the barony, I'm just an unemployed history nerd.

Agnes: Fate has twisted the knife; you've lost a barony and she's gained one. Neither of you asked for it, but there it is. **(Slight pause.)** Miles, do you remember the day you became the baron? That weight?

Miles: The weight, the responsibility, the sense of sheer helplessness...

Agnes: You'd been in training for years. Has she?

Miles: No.

Agnes: Even if only as her friend, she needs you. Even if she doesn't want to, she needs you.

(Miles leans his head back on her and Agnes absentmindedly strokes his hair)

Miles: What if she doesn't want me?

Agnes: **(Snorts.)** Then she's an idiot!

(Miles smiles despite himself.)

Agnes: **(Gently)** But she never struck me as an idiot. Hmm? **(She nudges Miles)** She's a pretty smart cookie, come to think of it. Smart, and sweet too. **(She nudges Miles again.)** That sounds to me like your favourite type of cookie.

Miles: Yeah, you're right. **(Sitting round to face her)** But what do I do about it? I've acted like a prize arse. I can hardly go riding up to her and say, 'Behold it is I, Lord Miles, I have come to declare my love for you.' I'm not a lord anymore. 'Behold, it's me and I think I love you,' doesn't really have the same ring to it.

Agnes: You'd be surprised, dear, with us gels. Besides, I've been thinking. One: all this talk of cookies has made me peckish. Help me up. I know where your mother keeps her ginger crumble cookies and I fancy one.

(Miles helps her up and they start moving towards stage right.)

Agnes: And two: I may have thought of a way for you to sound things out with Emily.

Miles: You're not just a pretty face then, Aunty.

Agnes: Flattery won't get me to share any of those ginger crumbles. You can have a custard cream.

(Both exit stage right. LFX: Lights dim to off.)

Scene 5 – Drawing Room

(LFX Lights up)

Voice: **(From off stage left.)** If you could wait in the drawing-room, Miss Elyngesham will be along shortly. This is a private room that isn't open to the public...

Emily: **(Entering stage left, wearing a summer dress, and talking to the voice offstage.)** Yes, I know, thank you. **(Emily walks further in and looks around the room. Pauses and sighs then begins to whisper in the room.)** Lord George...Lord George?... Are you here? ... George! ... So he's not here either it seems.

(Emily puts her bag on the sofa and goes to examine the painting stage left and then the coat of arms above the fireplace.)

Emily: **(Reading the motto.)** *'Ubi est thesaurus tuus, ibi est et cor tuum etiam.'* Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. They've got that right! I just need to work out what I treasure.

(Agnes enters from out of the bookcase secret passage. Emily suddenly notices her.)

Emily: Did you...did you just appear from out of that bookcase?

Agnes: Might have.

Emily: You're still using it then?

Agnes: Of course I am. This one, and the others no one knows about. Come here, dear. **(She holds her arms out to Emily.)**

(Emily crosses to Agnes, and Agnes kisses her cheek and takes her arm to cross to her chair.)

Agnes: It's been too long since I last saw you. A *month* isn't it? **(She sits, but keeps hold of Emily's hand.)** How are you doing?

Emily: I'm alright, Aunt Agnes.

Agnes: **(She gives her hand a little pat or a shake.)** Don't give me that old tosh. How are you really?

Emily: **(Blows her cheeks out.)** Confused, staggered, still trying to make sense of everything, wondering what the best thing is to do, finishing the year at uni, and pretending that nothing is different when everything is. You know, that kind of 'alright'.

Agnes: That's what I thought.

Emily: **(Sitting heavily on the sofa.)** I probably shouldn't even be talking to you about all this.

Agnes: Who else are you going to talk to about it?

Emily: **(Looking fed up.)** A lawyer, apparently.

Agnes: Give me strength!

Emily: I've only talked to mum about it really, not even my sister knows. She needs to concentrate on her A-levels and nothing else. 'Guess what, I've inherited a barony and all the trimmings' would be a bit of a distraction.

Agnes: Yes, it would somewhat. So what does your mum think?

Emily: Well, we did a bit of digging in the family, and it checks out from our side. Grandfather Jack was adopted and there was some hush-hush in the family about who his real parents were, but there were rumours on the farm. It was my mum who said I needed a lawyer, and he says...

Agnes: That you have a strong case, I suspect.

Emily: Yes, how did you know that?

Agnes: It's exactly what a lawyer *would* say. Incidentally, the family lawyer is also saying the same sorts of things to Miles, should he wish to contest the inheritance. And both are sitting in their respective offices rubbing their hands together with glee. Ker-ching, ker-ching. **(Rubbing her fingers together to sign 'money')**

Emily: That's a bit harsh.

Agnes: Maybe it is. It's just that I want *us* to sort it out, as a family; because that's what we are in the end.

Emily: It just all feels so complicated!

Agnes: Is it? How so, dear?

Emily: In some ways, it could be like a dream come true. Not living in a castle happily ever after and getting a makeover, like in the movies; no, not that. But the real dream come true of revitalising this beautiful estate. The potential here is unbelievable! I have half a notebook filled with ideas for the woodland area alone!

Agnes: That's my girl. You don't need any fairy godmother to have a ball.

Emily: You're the nearest thing I have to that, Aunt Agnes.

Agnes: Well, that's depressing! So what is the problem?

Emily: If I become the baroness, then that all sounds wonderful - hard work, but wonderful - for me. And maybe even for my mum and sister. But what about Millie, and you, and ...Miles? What happens to all of you? Where would you all go? This is your home! What happens if Miles wants to contest it and it all gets ugly? I don't want that.

Agnes: Poor little Emily. You can tell you're the eldest child; you're trying to make it right for everyone.

Emily: Yeah. That sounds like me.

Agnes: But could you live with yourself if you gave it up? Wouldn't it always be the biggest 'what if' imaginable? Get out of your head, girl! You're trying to *think* it all through and look at all the variables. What do you *want*?

Emily: Where is my treasure and my heart, kinda thing?

Agnes: Exactly. Sod the lawyers and feeling responsible for everyone. What is it that *you* want, Emily?

Emily: **(A bit tearfully.)** I want it to be like before, in May, when we had tea together, and Miles and I were working out in the East Wood with Mr Irvin. I hadn't been that happy since I was like 7 years old. But how can I take all this away from Miles? He's worked so hard; and it's your home, it's not just some environmental or business project, is it?

Agnes: Don't you worry about me. If you tried to get rid of me, I'd hide in the secret passages and steal food from the kitchens like a mouse!

Emily: I want you to stay! Maybe even the others too, if they wanted to, the house is big enough and I don't take up a lot of space. Maybe they wouldn't want to. Maybe they wouldn't want to see me. See? This is why it's complicated.

Agnes: It sounds to me like you want everyone to be happy.

(Emily nods with a sad smile.)

Agnes: You're not the type to want your picture in 'Hello' magazine and wear designer frocks, **(with an affected voice)** 'The new Baroness Emily Richards is at home...'

Emily: Only if I get to wear my cut-offs and my Nirvana t-shirt and talk about leaf mould! Nah, it's why I haven't said anything to anyone else, they wouldn't understand. It's not a Hallmark movie, it's real life.

Agnes: It's *your* life! And don't worry about Miles. He has property in London, and degrees and such; he isn't really the pillock I told you he was. He'll be alright.

Emily: Will he? I so want him to be happy, Aunt Emily, even if he doesn't want to see me. He isn't a pillock, he's a good man, and I just wish...oh, it doesn't matter now. Things can never be like they were before.

Agnes: No, they can't. But you can decide where you want to go from here. Here, I have something for you. **(Agnes opens her handbag and takes out the bottle of cherry brandy.)**

Emily: Vindaloo cherry juice! I remember that stuff.

Agnes: I figured you may as well have the rest of the bottle. I did ask for afternoon tea, but it hasn't arrived yet. **(She stands)** I think I'll go and find out what's become of it, and get us a couple of glasses to toast your future.

Emily: I can go, you stay here.

Agnes: No. You stay here. See what the house says to you. There's a lot of history here, and you're part of it now. You were from the moment you walked in, my dear.

Emily: Aunt Agnes, have you seen George recently? I haven't seen him since we found the dagger and everything.

Agnes: No, not much. **(She begins to walk across stage right, behind the table where she puts the bottle. She stops by Emily and cups her face in her hand.)** You know he didn't actually care about that old dagger, don't you? You were his treasure all along, dear.

Emily: I was what?

Agnes: You were - you are - a treasure. **(She pats Emily's cheek.)** I'll phone over to the tea rooms for some cakes too; cherry Bakewell tart to go with our cherry brandy, I think. **(She exits stage right.)**

Emily: **(She sits for a moment in quiet.)** I'm part of this now. Let the house speak. **(She stands and moves stage left to talk to the portrait.)** I had no idea about all this, George pulled a fast one. I don't know about how to be a baroness but I'd do my best: I'd look after it all, you know, and the family. But do you even want me here?

(SFX: Slight echo on his voice.)

Miles: **(From inside the secret passage.)** Yes!

Emily: **(Backing up and bumping into Agnes' chair.)** Oh, this shit just got real! I wasn't expecting an actual answer! Are there more of you, not just old George?

(The bookcase opens and Miles steps out of the passage.)

Miles: No, just me.

Emily: Miles! You nearly gave me a frigging heart attack! Oh, my goodness, I had visions of generations of ghosts popping out of everywhere...oh, man. **(Recovering her composure.)** Hello.

Miles: Hello.

Emily: You found out how to open it then?

Miles: Yes, Aunt Agnes showed me when I relocated all her bootleg bottles for her.

(They look at each other for a moment, Miles by the bookcase and Emily behind the chair.)

Miles: You look nice today.

Emily: Thanks.

Miles: It's not that you don't look nice every day...

Emily: Thanks.

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Miles: **(Moving forward towards the centre.)** Emily, I am so ashamed of the things I said to you, of how I have behaved...

Emily: **(Also moving towards him.)** It's alright, Miles. You'd had a massive shock, I don't know what I would have done if...

Miles: You would have been kind. I was just rude. And an utter idiot.

Emily: No, you weren't...

Miles: Yes, yes I was. I let you walk away.

(Emily doesn't know what to say to that. They are facing each other in front of the fireplace.)

Miles: I let you walk away, and it was the biggest mistake I've ever made. All this, **(he indicates the house)** when it comes down to it, is just stones and stuff, but you're flesh and blood. You're real.

Emily: But what about the barony and history and tradition?

Miles: It's all just peer pressure from dead people. I could have walked away at any time, you know. I have an uncle who was just gagging to get his hands on my ermine and coronet. I never considered it, as he'd probably turn the whole place into an exclusive golf course to turn a profit.

Emily: No! Who would do that?

Miles: He would. In a heartbeat. I heard it all, you know; your conversation with Aunt Agnes. I was behind the bookcase.

Emily: Oh. Isn't eavesdropping a bit below your pay grade?

Miles: Probably. But I wasn't sure if you wanted to see me after I'd shouted at you and avoided you for a month - and basically acted like a prize idiot. We spent all that time being with one another and talking to one another and then when you needed to talk to me, I just blanked you.

Emily: Because you were...

Miles: Because nothing, Emily. You deserved better than that. And so did the family. Emily, I *want* you to have the barony.

Emily: What?

Miles: I do, really.

Emily: But what will you do?

Miles: I don't know. The trajectory of my life had always been set out for me, and now maybe I have more of a choice.

Emily: Oh. I see.

Miles: No, it's not because of that. Emily, you're the best thing to have happened to Bletheringham Park, and to me. I confess that even before the 'big reveal', I was selfishly thinking of ways to keep you here. If being with me wasn't enough, then I was going to tempt you with eco-projects to delight your eco-geeking little heart: a school's activity centre, research...

Emily: You're enough.

Miles: Really?

(Emily nods.)

Miles: I'm so sorry I hurt you...

(Emily interrupts him by kissing him.)

Emily: I don't want you to go, though. Or any of you, for that matter.

Miles: Maybe I can stay on as your personal assistant.

Emily: How personal?

Miles: As personal as you'll let me be.

(He kisses her again, and leads her to sit on the sofa.)

Miles: But you will need an assistant and I know the barony ropes quite well.

Emily: **(Jokingly)** I thought I'd ask Amanda to help me. She was so good at it before.

Miles: Oh, she's gone.

Emily: Really?

Miles: Yes, I told her I was abdicating the barony...

Emily: Abdicating is just for monarchs, isn't it?

Miles: Yes, but she didn't know that. So I told her I was abdicating and moving to Buhavistan to join a commune, and placing the house in a trust...

Emily: Buhavistan doesn't even exist.

Miles: Nope. So, anyway, she resigned the very next day. She left about three weeks ago. I must confess my admin skills leave a lot to be desired. You'll need a proper secretary.

Emily: **(Laughing)** So you got rid of her? Naim's ravens, Miles; that was a bit devious, especially for you.

Miles: **(Seriously, looking at her intently.)** What did you say?

Emily: Don't be like that, I was only teasing...

Miles: No, you said '*Naim's ravens*'.

Emily: Yeah, sorry. It's an old family saying. It's a bit of an odd one, I know.

(Miles takes her hand and leads her to the 'window', downstage left.)

Miles: Come to the window. Emily, do you see that tower on the hill over there?

(Miles points out the 'window', into the audience.)

Emily: Er. Yeah...

Miles: That's *Naim's Folly*! Built in 1823 by Lord Herbert Elyngeham, and so named for his children Nicolas, Anne, Isaac, and Mary. Guess what has lived there for the last 200 years?

Emily: Ravens?

Miles: Ravens. 'Naim's ravens' is a saying in *my* family. Good grief, you belong here, Emily! As much as I do or Aunt Agnes. She told you to let the house speak, didn't she, and I think it has!

Emily: **(Pensively)** Maybe it has, Miles. I do love it here.

(They stand in each other's arms for a moment)

Miles: I think Blethingham loves you being here. I know I do.

Emily: Please stay.

Miles: I don't ever want to go where you're not.

Emily: All of you, though; it wouldn't be the same without all of you. I suppose I'll have to think about what I do from here on out.

Miles: As long as I can be with you, I'll be happy. Lady Emily, could I interest you in a walk down to the lake on this fine summer's day? **(Offering his arm.)**

Emily: What? Yes, but only if you knock it off with that Lady Emily lark. **(Knocking his arm away.)**

Miles: You'll have to get used to it, you know.

Emily: Yes, I know. But not today, and not from you! A walk sounds lovely, but it'll have to wait, though, Aunt Agnes will be back in a moment for us to have tea.

(Miles shakes his head knowingly.)

Emily: What do you mean, 'no'? **(Thinks for a second.)** She planned this, didn't she?

Miles: I couldn't get out of my own way, so she presented the secret passage idea. My manly masculine pride jumped at the idea; if you had wanted nothing to do with me, I could just slink away without actually having to face you.

Emily: Why would you think that I would want nothing to do with you? I was worried you hated me.

Miles: Never. Shall we go down to the lake, my love?

(Emily nods and turns to go out stage left, Miles catches her hand.)

Miles: Not that way, I know a shortcut.

(He leads her to the secret passage. Emily grabs her bag, and Miles the bottle of cherry brandy off the table. He opens the bookcase door.)

Miles: I don't think I've ever squeezed into a secret passage with a baroness before.

Emily: I should think not. That sounds very improper.

(They enter the passage.)

Miles: You still smell of apples and sunshine, you know.

Emily: And you still have a nice bum, although I can't see it here in the dark.

(The door closes. SFX: a slight echo on their voices)

Miles: Allow me to light the way with my phone, my lady.

Emily: Lead on.

Miles: Take my hand, Emily.

(They exit LFX: Lights down to blackout.)

The end.