

ACT 2

Scene 1 At the Summerfield's

Music.

Characters: MOLLY, CHARLOTTE, WILL

Enter Will, with spade in hand. He is hot and tired from grubbing the land behind their shack. Will puts the spade aside and rummages in a cupboard for something.

Enter Charlotte with a pail, dragging her feet as if tired. She begins kneading some dough on the table.

CHARLOTTE: Ma told me to make him damper. He got some possum meat for the stew tonight.

WILL: I reckon you should give him the rat pie like we had to eat other night.

CHARLOTTE: That'd be in keeping at least.

They laugh

WILL: Char?

Charlotte: What?

WILL: Show me the locket again will you? Our father's picture.

She pulls out the locket on a chain round her neck and flicks it open.

CHARLOTTE: Here you better be quick. Thomas could come in any minute.

He looks at it and the in turn she looks before she snaps it shut

WILL: You never take that locket off, do you Char?

CHARLOTTE: Never! Never! Because it's proof we had a *real* father. .

.WILL: Char?

He begins lining up some bedraggled plant specimens in small glass containers

Charlotte: What?

WILL: D'you think Ma's ever going to leave Thomas? She keeps saying she has plans but we need more money. Do you think she'll go?

CHARLOTTE: Dunno, but I know one damn thing. I will. I just don't know what she's so frightened of? He'll beat us? He already does that. Threaten us? He's already doing that.

WILL: That bloody noose he strung up in the shed just to show he can do murder here, she said was an act, that he'd never do it!

CHARLOTTE: I'm not so sure about that.

ENTER MOLLY

MOLLY: What d'you know, Char? Thomas's letting us go to Anne Turner's wedding- he's said we can go. Just now up there on the hill- you and me both! Worked the whole morning without a word and then suddenly out with it. You can go woman and take that lump of a girl of yours. Couldn't believe my ears.

CHARLOTTE: Out of the goodness of his rag and bone heart I suppose.

You mean Captain Molloy has leaned on him Ma, the viper. Because you're precious Mrs Molloy is going, and the Captain's to marry them in the absence of a vicar! He's leaned on Thomas and said he expects you to be there.

MOLLY: Don't be like that. I'm that thrilled to be going but I'm happy for you. Charlotte. No need to sneak off like you said you would and him come and hunt you down. I know Annie Turner has already sent over a dress for you to wear. I found it under your bed.

WILL: What'll *you* wear Ma? To the wedding

CHARLOTTE: Oh Ma can wear those gorgeous flour bag trousers she made for us. (*Holds up some shapeless sacking and laughs*)

MOLLY: Now don't you mind me, young Will. Get to your leather-working before he comes. Helen Heppingstone has kindly said I can borrow something from her if I get to go. And now we *are* going I'll borrow it all right. It's so kind of Turners to invite the likes of us.

MOLLY: Plans to attend a wedding! Who'd have thought?

CHARLOTTE: Plans to attend a funeral if we all stay here with him. Even Helen says he's a nasty man.

MOLLY: You shouldn't be discussing private family matters with all and sundry. Not with anyone else - if he gets to hear...

CHARLOTTE: What?

Charlotte thumps the dough on the table

MOLLY: It's true he's got a short fuse but he's been good about this wedding. We can both go Char!

She fingers her silver locket.

CHARLOTTE: What are you waiting for Ma? To leave this place in a shroud?

MOLLY: Look I have my plans, Cha. We need just a bit more money put by. Now that Will is working in the Molloy's garden and unloading at the dock he's earning a bit extra. And you're getting a bit of money for your cooking at the Barracks

WILL: Ma, I've spoken to one of the whalers when I was helping unload, and he says I can work my way to Perth. Yours too. And Charlotte's. I just have to sign up for a while...

And Charlotte and I have a fine hiding place in the woods already. A cave. Other day I found a native girl there, with a swollen ankle, and I helped her up and out, even though she was that frightened. She said her name was *Djanga*.

CHARLOTTE: Djanga?

WILL: Anyway, we've talked about it Char and me, lots of times. We can store our kitbags there, any stuff we want to take away. We can hide till nightfall, and then go on board a ship by cover of dark, and he won't be any the wiser.

MOLLY: No! We'd never get offshore. We need to wait until Thomas goes to Perth in a few months- about that land grant up there at the Vasse. He says the Molloy's have already claimed thousands of acres, and so have the Bussells, which means that everyone'll be leaving Augusta in the end.

Only be patient, Char...

And you Will, be careful with the blacks. Not all of them are friendly. I know Mrs Molloy encourages them and some of them even bring her those strange plants. But there's been talk of spearings and soldiers having to go and shoot them out. They set fire to the bushland, from time to time, so you never know...

CHARLOTTE: That girl, Will. *Djanga's* not her name. That's the name they give us whites. They call us *ghosts*, silly! *She was calling you a name!*

MOLLY: We must seem like that to them. I must tell Mrs Molloy next time. Even though Thomas says they don't have a language, they do! And Mrs Molloy is for recording it in a book.

She embarrassed that stuck-up John Bussell the other day, when he asked the meaning of what she was writing. She answered so sweet, with that grave expression of hers. 'It's their tribal name for our area ' *bibbulum* '. *Bibbulum* he asked? And she said straight to his face, "They call this place the land of breasts, you see, because of the hills." He was very flustered you could see it, her being so lady-like and all and coming out with it.

WILL: She's teaching me my letters too, so I can write down my own things.

CHARLOTTE: Oh you two, and your Mrs Molloy this, and Mrs Molloy that. Too good! Too kind! Lah-de-dah! Too religious for my liking. And Will why bother with your letters? As if you have time in this workhouse to write down pretty native words or anything else!

MOLLY: You should ask her to teach you, Charlotte. You're clever,

CHARLOTTE: They say she won't pay the women with their rations of flour if they don't come to the church service.

MOLLY: Who said that?

CHARLOTTE: My soldier friend Alfred that's who- and he should know.

He's told me other things too about Thomas. I know he says he can't abide those blacks, but Ma he lies down with them! There I've tried to tell you before and you won't have it. But he does! He lies down with them.

MOLLY: (*drops rolling pin*). I don't believe it! He chased one with his whip only yesterday because she was near the vegetable patch. He went raving mad, but she ran like an emu. Anyway he'll be here real soon. And don't forget to say thanks about the wedding, Char.

WILL: *Taking down the jars*. He told me I've got to take the new harness over to the Captain's before dark. So I'm going and you can tell him that's what I'm doing. And I'll take these plants I got for Mrs Molloy, same time, Ma.

MOLLY: *Looking at one of the ragged bunch more closely and inhaling*. Funny thing, there's kind of weird beauty about them, isn't there? And that smell I didn't like it at first...You've got me looking at them now. Or she has, Mrs Molloy. Charlotte you could gather some of those yellow ones out there on the hill, for the wedding, to wear in your hair...

Music

Lights

Act 2.

Gypsy music in the background

Scene 2. The Wedding

Characters: GEORGIANA, JACK. MOLLY, CHARLOTTE

Captain Molloy and Georgiana approach some chairs on the lawn at the Turner's house where the sound of the wedding crowd in the garden is to be heard. He is solicitous of his wife helping her to sit down.

JACK: Rest awhile here, Georgie. That was a lively dance for sure.

GEORGIANA: Just a few moments. I must say I think folk have forgotten all their troubles. And the table is a picture. All the native flowers for decoration - quite breath-taking.

JACK: And your bonnet, quite the most fetching, Mrs Molloy.

GEORGIANA: You look well too, Captain Molloy, in your full dress uniform. Very impressive. And the bride, quite lovely! Every woman here is envious of such fabric, and the ribbons on her dress!

Jack looks offstage.

JACK: I must say the groom looks much older than little Anne - but who am I to comment on that, dear one?

GEORGIANA: You may be quite a deal older than I, Jack, but you seem younger and stronger each year, the harder you work!

JACK: You flatter me. Now I know why we were so happily spliced!

GEORGIANA: They look happy too! But you go and talk to the guests now Jack, and I'll just rest here a while.

Georgiana leans back on a deckchair

EXIT Jack

ENTER Molly Summerfield who stands on the other side of the stage.

ENTER Charlotte. She is red-faced, and exhausted from some wild dancing. .

CHARLOTTE: Those gypsies can really play. That young boy with so much curly hair- he's asked me to dance again. But I have to get my breath!

MOLLY: You want to look out, Char! Dancing like that with a stranger. People talk. If Thomas comes by, and he just might-

CHARLOTTE: If Thomas comes by Ma, he can look all he wants because I probably won't be here. The gypsy boy said there's room on board the schooner for someone like me. And I might just go tonight!

MOLLY: Don't talk that nonsense Char - not now. Just sit over there behave for goodness sake...that wild music, it quite unnerves me.

CHARLOTTE Well it makes *me* want to dance and sing!

Molly restrains her as she makes as if to leave again.

Georgiana gets up to join Molly.

GEORGIANA: Mrs Summerfield.

MOLLY: Why Mrs Molloy - you remember my daughter, Charlotte.

GEORGIANA: You look lovely my dear, in that sweet white dress. And such a pretty little locket.

CHARLOTTE: (*She curtsies prettily*) Annie herself loaned me this dress or I couldn't have come, ma'am. And this locket, this holds a likeness of my Papa. He had it painted in Plymouth, and one of my mother too, only we lost that one. Or at least someone stole it! (*She fumbles with the locket to open for Georgiana to inspect*)

GEORGIANA: In Plymouth. Why Captain Molloy insisted I had *my* likeness painted there. Perhaps the very same artist. Wouldn't that be a coincidence? (*She leans forward to inspect the locket*). He looks to be a very kind man!

CHARLOTTE: The kindest! Thank you ma'am.

But I'd better go now, Mrs Molloy.

Charlotte moves away, waving to someone and Molly looks troubled.

GEORGIANA: You know Mrs Summerfield, I met a gypsy musician in Plymouth that same day of my portrait painting, too. A garland of flowers fell from my hair as we passed by, and he picked it up and as he offered it back to me he told my fortune, the way they can.

MOLLY: Oh I hope it was only of good fortune he spoke.

GEORGIANA: He spoke of flowers. He told me, "Flowers, m'lady. All of your life. Flowers..." Strange to say, and not that I hold with fortune telling at all, but here I am in far away land, collecting all the flowers I can!

MOLLY: And I've found a new flower for you, in the forest near our place. At least I think it is, just yesterday. Here, I brought it in my bag

She reaches into her bag for a plant wrapped in rag

GEORGIANA: (*accepting the plant*)

Thank you. So kind. My collection's certainly growing now. And I need to make haste with it. There are scientists and botanists everywhere, quite agog with curiosity about our plants and flowers.

MOLLY: I'm sure, ma'am. Everything being so different here. To some it might seem we've come to live on the moon!

GEORGIANA: But Mrs Summerfield, I've wanted to talk to you for a time. . I know this is not quite the right time, but it's been weeks, maybe months since we've seen you on Sundays!

MOLLY: Mr Summerfield, he says we're too busy for me to attend the church services any more. I must say I'm sorry as I did so enjoy coming, and seeing your garden and all but...

GEORGIANA: No, it's not about the church services. I want to ask you about something else.

MOLLY: Ma'am?

GBEORGIANA: Mrs Summerfield (*touches her arm*) is everything all right at home? I want to ask you, if you or your children are being mistreated in any way?

Molly is silent.

You know you only have to turn to me or to the captain. No one has the right to

MOLLY: Oh there's no cause for concern, Mrs Molloy. He's strict with the children, Thomas is, and we all work hard but everything's fine.

GEORGIANA: The bruises on Will's arms and legs? I couldn't help but notice when he comes to work in the field or my garden, and the other day when he took off his shirt at the well. I commented to the Captain.

MOLLY: He's a wild boy. He had a fall from a tree you know.

GEORGIANA: And *your* black eye a few weeks ago, when we met on the path?

MOLLY: That was a silly fall I had in the dairy. As I say, no cause for concern
Mrs Molloy

GEORGIANA: Mrs Summerfield, please do remember that if ever you should need us

Molly turns to leave...and thank you for bringing the flower.

Music rises.

MOLLY: *turning to Georgiana* Excuse me, please excuse me but I must go- I've just seen my husband out there on the path!

GEORGIANA: Mrs Summerfield - is everything-?

MOLLY: Fine thank you, Mrs Molloy. But I must go now.

Molly hurries away as Jack re-enters

JACK: She seems in a hurry!

GEORGIANA: That Summerfield! I'm certain he mistreats them Jack. We should- you should intervene, before there's tragedy.

JACK: He drinks a bit too much, I know that. But he's a fine horse-breaker and a good leather-maker. The best. And he's teaching the boy the trade.

GEORGIANA: But if he's violent with them - surely we should do something?

JACK: Yes but it needs to be proven, dear one. And to date the boy has shown a few bruises but hasn't complained about a thing. Nor has his mother

GEORGIANA: I'm sure she doesn't come to the church services anymore because she can't bear to show her face.

JACK: *patiently*. Then I'll talk to her dear one. I'll talk to him. But as I say, there has to be proof and she must agree to make a statement. Now don't get it into your head there'll be any tragedy!

I'll think it a tragedy if my dear wife doesn't come and tread a measure with me before we go home.

GEORGIANA: Oh no! That gypsy music, Jack. I'm sure it's inciting too much drinking - by night there'll be wild behaviour. Should you-?

JACK: We won't dance, then dearest, but let the others enjoy it!

GEORGIANA: I can't stop thinking of her. Please send our Mr Dawson to the Summerfield farm, first thing tomorrow on some excuse or other.

The gypsy music begins again

JACK: If you insist, Mrs Molloy, but I think you're worrying needlessly...

He takes her arm

They walk off stage but the word tragedy is heard above the rising music.

GEORGIANA: - if I'm not mistaken Jack - tragedy

ACT 2. Scene 3 THOMAS

Characters: CHARLOTTE, THOMAS

Thomas and Charlotte circling each other. Thomas makes a lunge from time to time, Charlotte puts the table between them.

THOMAS: I dragged you home here, you slut of a girl, to teach you a lesson once and for all. Come here!

CHARLOTTE: Never! Never! Don't touch me, you- you gallows-faced cur!

THOMAS: You dare name call me- I saw you and that boy. I saw what you were up to...

So you'd do it with gypsy filth would you?

CHARLOTTE: What's it to you who I dance with? It's a wedding. People dance!

THOMAS: That boy-girl dance that said it all, you slut of a girl.

CHARLOTTE: Boy he may be. But you, you're not half the man...

THOMAS: Still got a lip on you, haven't you? You never seem to learn, girl. Not like you Ma, she knows when to shut up, good and proper. Not you though, you poxy little loudmouth. Well words won't get you out of here, you whore!

He swoops round the table catching Charlotte who fights back but he pushes her to the floor, standing over her. He begins to unbuckle his belt.

CHARLOTTE: Don't you touch me! Don't dare touch me!

She kicks at him and he staggers back and falls. In that moment as he struggles to climb to his feet, she's up on her feet and grabs a kitchen knife.

THOMAS: *(sneeringly)* So you'd do me in would you?

CHARLOTTE: I'll kill you Thomas if you come near me. So help me I'll kill you!

THOMAS: Not with that toy knife you won't girl. Now c'mon give it here

CHARLOTTE: If you so much as touch me-

THOMAS: You'll what?

He gains on her and grabs the knife that clatters to the floor

CHARLOTTE: I'll tell the Molloy's everything, that's what!

He grabs her by the wrist

THOMAS: Not if I don't tell them first you're an uncontrollable slut and a -

CHARLOTTE: -about the black women. About how you lie down with them

THOMAS: What did you say?

CHARLOTTE: About what you did to one of them. Where you put her. Maybe more'n one. Yes. I know! I know! And you'll swing for it!

THOMAS: I'll bloody-well throttle you, you little-

He slaps her and raises his hand to slap again but falters as she speaks

CHARLOTTE: And someone else knows too. And if any harm comes to me, he knows to go to Captain Molloy direct!

THOMAS: You sly, filthy bitch

CHARLOTTE: A soldier boy!

He draws back his hand to punch her this time but Molly bursts onto the scene

MOLLY: No, no don't hurt her Thomas! I can explain everything. She wasn't-

Thomas punches table

THOMAS: *(running out)* AHHHHH!

MOLLY: Oh Charlotte, Charlotte. What's going on?

CHARLOTTE: Can't you see for yourself. Your animal husband. I called is bluff that's what I did!

MOLLY: What did you say to him for God's sake?

CHARLOTTE: He's an animal. Worse than

MOLLY: I'll get some water. You sit tight.

CHARLOTTE: He ordered me home but not just to beat me, Ma. He tried to rape me Ma, he tried to rape me!

MOLLY: Oh God! Oh no! Charlotte!

CHARLOTTE: I can't stay here anymore. I got to go.

MOLLY: I know. I know. But where? .

CHARLOTTE: Come with me now, Ma. Let's pack our things, fetch Will and go. Let's do it now. Make the break we've talked about forever! I know there's work in Perth, Anne Turner told me. Lots of work to be had. Let's go Ma.

MOLLY: No Char no! Not now love. I can't go. Not just yet

CHARLOTTE: Ma!

MOLLY: He told me that if ever I did leave him, he'd follow. And that he'd kill both of you. Not me- no not me- just you children. That's what he said and Charlotte I believe it!

CHARLOTTE: Listen to me Ma, just listen. We've had hard times before Thomas was in our lives. When Pa died and all. But this, this here with him is hell on earth.

MOLLY: I can't. You don't understand.

CHARLOTTE: Being here with him, it's not living, Ma. This is just too hard, and you know it. He kills every scrap of happiness or ease we might have. I can't even bear to hear happy families speak to one another, because I think why not me? Why not us? Come with me now- it's our chance. You, me and Will. A chance for all of us.

She looks entreatingly at her mother for long moments and then when her mother looks away she shrugs.

I'm going then. I'll take a few things. There's a ship in the harbour

MOLLY: I'll help you pack. In good time, we'll come. I'll find a way. But you best go carefully to that ship. If Thomas sees you again...

They begin feverishly gathering a few things and stuffing them into a bag.

CHARLOTTE: He won't hurt me, even if he does see me. Not right now anyway.

MOLLY: That was strange though, his running off like that.

CHARLOTTE: And he won't hurt you. If he threatens you Ma, just say this for me will you. Say, *that black woman*

MOLLY: That black woman?

CHARLOTTE: I think he's killed someone- a black woman- and the way he went on just now, I'm sure of it.

MOLLY: No Char- he wouldn't-

I've no proof but my soldier friend Alfred has his suspicions too. So just say it. It works magic!

She hugs her mother, takes her bag and goes to the door.

Please Ma, just say it!

Music

Stage lights down

