

BYRON'S DARKNESS

Episode 1: Dawn Breaks

by

Drew Castalia

CAST

HARLAND SHIELS	A producer of pantomimes; a modern man and husband.
GRACE SHIELS	His devoted wife.
JAMIE	Their footman.
WILLAM	A family friend of the Shiels and a player.
REVEREND YOUNG	Clergyman at Saint Nicholas church.
TOWN CRIER	Peddles in advertisements, the news, and prophecies of doom.
LITTLE GIRL	A sweet child.
RUDOLPHO	Professor of madness.
LAWRENCE CONQUEST	Captain of the Scottish 21st light cavalry.
ROLAND THAMESON	Important member of Parliament. A Whig.
CHOIR / TOWNSPEOPLE	A lively bunch.
DEATH	Conquest's Lieutenant.

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SCENE 1: EPISODE "TITLES"

PEACEFUL, SINGING BIRDS CELEBRATE THE DAY. A BOY AND A GIRL LAUGH TOGETHER.
THE STEADY HUBBUB OF A MARKET ON THE GRASS.

CRIER: One penny! One penny for a whole bouquet! But for you, little one...

LITTLE GIRL: For me?

GIGGLES. A PANTING DOG BARKS. SEAGULLS CRY OVERHEAD. THE JINGLE OF SADDLED
HORSES DRAWING A COACH ACROSS GRASS. A BEE SWOOPS LOW. MUSICIANS PLAY. THE
SOUNDS OF DAY BEGIN TO CROWD EACH OTHER.

CRIER: A fine day to you, sir. One penny for posies. Delight your loved ones. One penny to make them laugh!
You look like you could use some posies, sir! What about you? Or you? Or you? Or you?

THE DOG BARKS LOUDER, IN TIME WITH THE HAWKER. THE PEACEFUL SOUNDS AND MUSIC
GROW CACAPHONOUS. THE DOG GROWLS. SUDDENLY,

SILENCE.

LITTLE GIRL: (WHISPERS) Darkness.

SCENE 2: THE ROYAL THEATRE

WILLAM DROPS A BAGPIPE. IT SQUEALS.

HARLAND: Stop fooling around Willam, this is important.

WILLAM: I'm not fooling around.

HARLAND: The chances of that being true, at any given moment...

WILLAM: It's your fault it's dark in here. You've let the lanterns on the stage run out.

HARLAND: (SIGHS) It'll be light out soon anyway. Let's just get on with it.

WILLAM: Where do you want the fake parrot so they can switch it out for the live one?

HARLAND: I think you'd best attach it to the edge of the curtain with a hook or something.

WILLAM: Squawk! Squawk! Squawwwk!

HARLAND: Willam.

WILLAM: Sorry.

HARLAND: You're like a child.

WILLAM: No, I mean, I'm sorry about the parrot. I, eh, look... the fluff is coming out.

HARLAND: For God's sake. You'd better fix that by call tomorrow night or we'll use your severed head instead.

WILLAM: What makes you think my head would make a suitable replacement? Oh, right; I get it.

THE DOOR OF THE THEATRE GROANS OPEN. WITH A WISP OF WIND, GRACE SHUTS IT BEHIND HER.

HARLAND: Who's there?

CHINA CLINKS ON A TRAY IN HER HANDS.

GRACE: I thought you two could use some tea and biscuits if you were going to be here much longer. Call it breakfast if you like.

WILLAM: What else do you call it?

HARLAND: Grace! What are you doing up this late? You should be in bed.

GRACE: I'm not ill, dear. I'm pregnant.

HARLAND: It didn't happen like this last time.

GRACE: Don't be so anxious. These things change with age. Besides, the doctor came today and said that moods and nightmares are perfectly normal. I'm feeling fine now; without the twins around, I have to take care of someone or I'll go mad. I doubt the doctor would consider that an improvement.

WILLAM: Ooh. Gingerbread.

HARLAND: Well, if you're desperate for a substitute, Willam is your man. The twins are obedient angels next to him.

GRACE LAUGHS.

HARLAND: Did you see their letter today?

GRACE: The twins? Yes, although I could tell the matrons had pored over it for grammar and who knows what else. Not a single misspelt word, not even "dormitory", which was highly suspect I thought.

HARLAND: Who knows. Maybe the school's as good as they claim.

GRACE: I hope so. (SIGHS) I'm sorry. You had better get back to your work if we want to keep paying for it.

HARLAND: Right you are. Besides, I don't want to be up all night if I can help it. Thank you for the tea, dear. You're a sweetheart

WILLAM: (AROUND A MOUTHFUL) Thanks Mrs. Shiels!

GRACE: Willam, promise me you won't use this as an excuse not to come to noontime communion tomorrow. I never see you there anymore. Sola gratia, remember?

WILLAM: By grace alone.

GRACE: Very good. Now, good night!

HARLAND: Good night, my love!

GRACE LEAVES THROUGH THE CREAKY DOOR AS GENTLY AS SHE CAN.

HARLAND: You ate all the biscuits.

WILLAM: You can have all the tea.

HARLAND GRUNTS.

SCENE 3: THE FOYER

JAMIE, HARLAND'S FOOTMAN, MUTTERS TO HIMSELF IN A DREAM.

HARLAND: Wake up!

HARLAND'S FOOTMAN SPLUTTERS.

JAMIE: Eh, what! What?!

HARLAND: I'm home.

JAMIE: Mr. Shiels?

HARLAND: I could be a burglar about to steal something and you'd never know. Your commission, for example.

JAMIE: Oh sir! I'm very sorry. I haven't been asleep for long. I take my job very seriously, you know.

HARLAND TAKES A DEEP BREATH.

HARLAND: I know... I'm tired too. What time is it? Seems like the longest night ever.

JAMIE: Thank you sir. That it does. Er, the clock chimed eight not long ago but it must have gone fast. I'll have it repaired the moment the sun comes up.

HARLAND: Oh, sleep in if you like. Go on. We'll be doing the same.

JAMIE: Well - thank you kindly, sir! Have a restful night.

HARLAND: I plan on it.

SCENE 4: THE SHIELS BEDROOM

HARLAND SNORES PEACEFULLY. THEIR BEDROOM CLOCK TICKS IN THE BACKGROUND.

CRIER: (BELOW HIS WINDOW, FO) The end is near! Repent your sins! Gather your loved ones! Pray to your saviour! The end is near!

BESIDE HIM, GRACE TOSSES AND TURNS, WHIMPERING UNDER THE CROWDED FRAGMENTS OF A NIGHTMARE: GREAT FIRES BURNING, SCREAMING, THE SPLUTTERS OF DISEASED CHILDREN, WOODEN HOMES SPLINTER AND FALL APART, TOWN BELLS TOLL A SLOW WARNING, HORSEMEN GALLOP ON THE COBBLED STREET AND THEIR HORSES SCREAM.

GRACE: No... Please, no!

SHE BEGINS TO CRY, THEN WAKES WITH A GASP. THE TOWN BELLS FROM HER DREAM CONTINUE TO TOLL.

HARLAND: Grace! Grace, wake up! Grace, dear!

GRACE: What! Who's there? I can't see!

HARLAND: Shh, it's me. I'm here.

GRACE: Oh, Harland! A dream! Thank God! I imagined such horrible things. The Tyne was on fire and our children... (PAUSE, CATCHING HER BREATH) Where are the children?

HARLAND: Grace... the children are in London. Remember? We sent them there last month.

GRACE: (COMING TO HER SENSES) We did? Oh! Yes, of course. How could I forget?

HARLAND: Do you want me to call the doctor?

GRACE: No... I'm fine. I'm sorry to wake you.

HARLAND: Never mind. What time is it?

GRACE: Uh - I can't quite read the timepiece. It must be another gloomy day. I think about ten o'clock?

THE BELLS STRIKE FOR THE ELEVENTH TIME.

GRACE: Eleven! Harland, come on, we're going to be late.

HER FEET HIT THE FLOORBOARDS.

HARLAND: Oh, never mind. We can be late to church for once. Come back from the window before you freeze.

GRACE: I'll go on myself, then. Willam and I will pray for you.

HARLAND: (SIGHS) All right, all right. I'm getting up.

GRACE: Sometimes I worry for your soul, dear one. Punctuality is a sign of grace.

THE TWELFTH.

GRACE: Oh.

HARLAND: Come along, dear. We can get there before the service ends. Just let in some light, will you?

SHE SCRAPES THE CURTAINS ASIDE ON THEIR ROD.

GRACE: We couldn't have slept through the day, could we?

HARLAND: (SLIPPING ON TROUSERS) What do you mean?

GRACE: It's still dark outside.

HARLAND: Nonsense.

GRACE: And Harland? I can't see the stars.

THE BELLS STRIKE AGAIN. THIRTEEN.

SCENE 5: THE CHURCH.

THE CHURCH BELLS CONTINUE TO TOLL OVERHEAD. THEY ARE NOT RINGING THE HOUR, BUT TOLLING AN ALARM.

THE CHURCH IS FULL OF WORRIED MURMURS. IN THE BACKGROUND, A CHOIR SINGS A HYMN TO THE TUNE OF "REPTON" BY CHARLES HUBERT HASTINGS PARRY

CHOIR:

The ambry candle has burnt out,
The Verger failed indeed.
So here I sit in church with fright
Before the Presence, in the night,
Without a light to lead.
Without a light to lead.

The doors some eighty feet behind,
And forty pews beside.
I'll try to grope my way with care.
Who left their hassock lying there?
Give me a light to guide!
Give me a light to guide!

WILLAM: Your wife is so devout.

HARLAND: (WHISPERING) What do you mean?

WILLAM: (NOT WHISPERING) Just look at her praying. You're very lucky to have a woman with such spirit.

HARLAND: I'm worried about her. She thinks it might be the end.

WILLAM: Well, if it's over between you I hope you don't mind if I take over. (LAUGHS)

HARLAND: I am not amused, William.

WILLAM: No, no. Not yet! We've still got a play on tonight, remember? Don't think that the end of the world will change that!

HARLAND: The show must go on, eh?

WILLAM: Exactly! These people could use a laugh.

HARLAND: Shhh!

WILLAM: Sorry.

HARLAND: Do you really think a play is such a good idea right now? Everyone's pretty worried.

WILLAM: I'm not!

HARLAND: Of course you're not. You never take things seriously. That's why you have so many illegitimate children.

WILLAM: A hit! (LAUGHS) The play is about the King, not me, remember!

HARLAND: Witty. Maybe you should be the playwright.

WILLAM: Our company could use some stimulation.

HARLAND: Come now William, I won't have you shilling opium on to the players again.

WILLAM: (LAUGHS NOISILY) Don't worry, the Chinese are increasingly tight-fisted these days.

HARLAND: Shhh. The stuff clouds the judgment.

WILLAM: That's my Harland. So tell me, how does a sober mind like yours account for this darkness?

HARLAND: I don't know. Maybe the Earth has left its orbit, or perhaps a volcano, sending ash into the sky. There must be a rational explanation.

WILLAM: Like you, I shall have *faith* that there is. (LAUGHS)

HARLAND: Shhh!

THE BELLS STOP TOLLING.

REVEREND YOUNG: Ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for coming. Many of you are no doubt alarmed at our summons, already anxious about the darkness that has not left our city's sky; this was not our aim. We brought you here for the opposite purpose, and the purpose which we hope you already associate with our congregation: comfort, clemency, temperance, love. There is no reason to fear. There is never reason to fear while God is with you. And he is with us all, now no less than ever. In Genesis, it was in a thick and dreadful darkness that God spoke to Abram, and from darkness that he spoke to Moses. What crowds these meagre candles need not be the darkness of the book of Revelation. We have not seen the signs! I hear no trumpets, feel no flood; I am not more newly acquainted with nightmarish horsemen than I was. And even were I these things, I would rejoice with laughter. For the faithful will be saved. *Sola fide, sola gratia, amen.*

CHURCHGOERS: (HESITANTLY) Amen.

REVEREND YOUNG: And now our... a representative from parliament wishes to address the community. Roland Thameson.

THAMESON: Ahem. The Church of England has always expressed the views of the state most eloquently. We owe them our gratitude. Bravo.

HE CLAPS HIS HANDS BY HIMSELF.

THAMESON: Uh, yes. Like the Reverend said, please do not panic. I will be leaving for, um, visiting London soon to discuss what we, the government of this great United Kingdom, are to do about the situation here in Newcastle. We shall act swiftly and vigorously under the direction of the King, whose mental acuity and ... vigor are as strong as ever. I guarantee the state shall be making its presence felt most strongly until this situation is resolved - in order to deter troublemakers. We will be rationing gas, wood, and candles for the time being. As always, we have the common interest at heart in the lower house of Parliament. That is all. Thank you.

THE MURMURING STRIKES UP AGAIN AS THAMESON LEAVES THE PULPIT.

HARLAND: What a Whig.

WILLAM: I've seen better.

REVEREND YOUNG: Good evening Harland, Willam.

HARLAND: 'Morning Reverend.

WILLAM: Good afternoon.

REVEREND YOUNG: (CHUCKLES) Indeed. I trust you two are keeping cool heads.

HARLAND: Thank you, yes.

WILLAM: I'm wearing a hat.

REVEREND YOUNG: Very good Willam. I'm glad to see that did not stop you from joining us for the service today.

WILLAM: I beg your pardon, Reverend. I've been here every Sunday!

REVEREND YOUNG: Yes. These are truly strange times.

HARLAND: Reverend, is there anything we can do to be of service?

REVEREND YOUNG: As a matter of fact, there is. I trust the play is still scheduled for tonight?

HARLAND: Well...

WILLAM: Of course.

REVEREND YOUNG: I'm glad to hear it.

HARLAND: You support the idea, Reverend?

REVEREND YOUNG: Naturally. There's no more pious a thing than finding joy in the blackest of moments. To find joy is to find God and be saved. If you two can give Newcastle that opportunity at this needy time then I will bless your vulgar pantomime myself.

WILLAM: See? "The play's the thing to catch the conscience of the King".

HARLAND: Shut up, Willam.

REVEREND YOUNG: (DISAPPOINTED) The play's about King William?

WILLAM: Don't worry. It's very funny. Harland's got a happy heart in there somewhere.

HARLAND CLEARS HIS THROAT ANXIOUSLY.

HARLAND: Is there a problem, Reverend?

REVEREND YOUNG: It's just... no. I wish you the best of luck tonight. I look forward to seeing you there.

HARLAND: Reverend, wait. I'm embarrassed to say it, but my little gaff doesn't cater very well to your... vocation. If you were to come...

REVEREND YOUNG: You don't think a cleric can laugh? (LAUGHING) Cheer up, Harland. Or perhaps I should say, God bless you!

SCENE 6: SAINT NICHOLAS.

HARLAND AND GRACE WALK TOGETHER ALONG COBBLED SAINT NICHOLAS THROUGH A

CROWD OF WORRIED CHURCHGOERS. THE CHURCH BELLS NO LONGER TOLL.

HARLAND: You see, my love? No hellfire. No vengeful angels in the sky.

GRACE: Just darkness.

THE COUPLE STOPS WALKING.

HARLAND: Grace, it's going to be okay.

GRACE: How can you say that? Everyone else fears for their soul and you say, pretty as you please, that everything is going to be fine!

THE CROWD OF CHURCHGOERS GOES QUIET.

HARLAND: (WHISPERS) Calm down. You're acting hysterical.

GRACE: Don't I have the right?

HARLAND GETS GRACE WALKING AGAIN.

HARLAND: Let's get you out of here. Not everyone is as frightened as you are. Not yet, at least.

GRACE: Harland, I want to go to London.

HARLAND: What?

GRACE: To make sure the children are safe.

HARLAND: Grace...

GRACE: What if the darkness has come to London too? What if something has happened to them?

THEY CROSS A BRIDGE. WATER GUSHES UNDERNEATH.

HARLAND: Like what? No, don't answer that. Don't think it. The children are perfectly safe.

GRACE: Alone in the dark.

HARLAND: They've got matrons and servants aplenty; we pay them enough.

GRACE: What if --

HARLAND: Grace! For God's sake if not for mine, listen. We can't just go to London. What about my play? One paycheque will do more for our children than a visit ever would. What if you really are pregnant? What about Newcastle? We can't just abandon it based on some irrational fear. Reverend Young asked me to stay and produce the play, and I think he's right. The people need me here, and I need you to stay calm.

THEY START WALKING AGAIN.

GRACE: ... What do you mean, for God's sake if not for yours?

HARLAND: For the childrens' then.

GRACE: You know I love *you*, Harland.

HARLAND: I know. I love you too; I want nothing more than for you to feel safe, that's why I wish you could see that the world is still turning. It will be back to its business before you realise it.

A TOWN CRIER RINGS HIS BELL.

CRIER: Hear ye! Hear ye! The end is near! The end of an age!

HARLAND: Oh, Christ. Just who we need. Out of our way!

CRIER: Chartists demand electoral reform! Poor men demand the vote! Rumours of flood in the south!

HARLAND: We don't want to hear it! Move on.

CRIER: Rebellion growing in China! King William rumored ill. All the facts, all the time. *The Times* for a tanner.

HARLAND: The facts! Don't make me laugh.

CRIER: Just doing my job, sir. How about you?

HARLAND: What did you say?

CRIER: I am addressing the lady. How about you? *The Times* for a tanner?

GRACE: Ah...

HARLAND: Leave her alone. We already have to deal with enough hearsay.

CRIER: (LAUGHS) Hear say! Hear say!

HARLAND: Shut up!

CRIER: You're in a mood tonight - er, today - sir. Two tickets to the theatre this evening for a shilling, that'll change your heart. A new pantomime called "King William at Sea" by a local man called --

HARLAND PUNCHES HIM IN THE MOUTH.

CRIER: Ow. (SPITS) Blackguard! You'll regret that...

GRACE: Harland!

HARLAND: Leave my wife alone!

HARLAND HITS HIM AGAIN.

GRACE: Harland, stop it!

HARLAND: Get out of here! Go on, vermin!

THE CRIER RUNS OFF.

HARLAND: (PANTING) I would do anything to protect you, my love.

SCENE 7: HOME SWEET HOME

HARLAND UNLOCKS AND ENTERS HIS HOUSE.

HARLAND: (OFF) Home sweet home. We'll be safer here.

A RIFLE COCKS.

JAMIE: Hold!

HARLAND GASPS.

JAMIE: Is that you Mr. Shiels?

HARLAND: What, Jamie!

GRACE: (COMING INSIDE) Jamie?

JAMIE: And Mrs. Shiels! Thank God you're both all right.

HARLAND: Yes thank God! You nearly scared me stiff.

JAMIE: My apologies, sir. It's very dark.

HARLAND: What is the matter?

JAMIE: I am afraid it would offend the lady.

HARLAND: Grace?

GRACE: What? Oh, I'm sorry. I think I should excuse myself anyway, if you don't mind.

HER BOOTS CREAK UP THE FOYER STAIRCASE.

JAMIE: Is Mrs. Shiels quite herself sir?

HARLAND: Of course she is. We were assaulted in the street by a doomsayer. We could have used you then: but I dealt with the situation myself.

JAMIE CLICKS THE SAFETY BACK ON THE RIFLE.

HARLAND: What are you doing with my rifle, anyway?

JAMIE: It pertains to my report. I took it down when I heard them in the street. Four horsemen, galloping like demons through the city at church hour. I thought little of it but to be annoyed - when they began to sound their trumpets. Seven clarions, clear as ice, pierced the night. I was consumed at once with an unconquerable fear and I witnessed in a vision great terrors. It was horrible -- the four horsemen of the apocalypse, here in Newcastle!

HARLAND: A vision, indeed? Or perhaps you just fell asleep again.

JAMIE: Believe what you like sir, it's a footman's job to deliver the warning.

HARLAND: Jamie, warnings don't come in dreams.

JAMIE: Sometimes dreams are the only warning one has.

SCENE 8: CANDLE LIGHT.

GRACE OPENS A CLOSET, THEN CLOSES IT IRRITABLY.

GRACE: Where have the candles gone?

HARLAND CLIMBS THE STAIRS AND REACHES THE LANDING.

HARLAND: Grace? Are you looking for something?

GRACE: The little ones. I thought they were here somewhere. If I could only remember.

HARLAND: The little ones?

GRACE: Yes - you know how they brighten the house up, so? I could use a bit of that right now.

HARLAND: Grace, are you feeling all right?

GRACE: (IGNORING THE QUESTION) Did you do something with them? You know, hide them away?

HARLAND: Grace, the little ones are in London...

GRACE: (PAUSE, LAUGHS) Try as I might to be angry with you, Harland, I cannot keep it up. I'm looking for the little *candles*. You remember, the short ones that last the night?

HARLAND: Oh! Oh. Forgive me, I thought...

GRACE: Thought I had gone mad.

HARLAND: Then you'll be all right?

GRACE: Who's to say if any of us will? Not if this is God's punishment for our sins.

HARLAND: What sins?

GRACE IS QUIET.

HARLAND: This isn't the Second Coming, Grace. There's a perfectly simple explanation out there. The thing is, I can't shake this feeling that I know something about what's going on. Maybe something I read at the college.

GRACE: Theology, perhaps.

HARLAND: Perhaps... I wonder if old Rudolpho is still teaching there?

GRACE: It's a university now. Last I heard they were clearing out all the old scholars.

HARLAND: Even so, it would be worth a visit to put your mind at ease. If anyone has a rational answer for what's going on, it'd be him. Anyway, it could jog my memory at least.

GRACE: Very well. Why don't you go on?

HARLAND: You should come with me. Rudolpho likes you.

GRETA: I'm not feeling up to a journey right now.

HARLAND: I said I would protect you, Greta.

GRETA: I'm not going all the way down to Durham, Harland. I have a loose end to tie up back at the church.

HARLAND: Always the church.

GRACE: Are you jealous?

HARLAND: Just promise me there will be someone with you.

GRACE: Oh, there will be. Willam said he would be there before your show tonight.

HARLAND: Willam prays? Huh. Well, I will be sure to be back before then. I love you, Grace.

GRACE: We will always be together, in spirit if not in person.

HARLAND: Come on, let's find those candles. It's about time we illuminated ourselves.

SCENE 9: BEFORE THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

JAMIE GUIDES A HORSEDRAWN COACH TO REST IN THE STREET BEFORE HARLAND'S HOME.

HARLAND: Bring the coach over here!

THE SINGLE HORSE SNORTS AND FUSSES.

JAMIE: Woah.. easy..

HARLAND: Did you harness her too tightly?

JAMIE: That's not what spooks her. It's the darkness, I fear.

GRACE: She'll be fine. She has a strong spirit.

HARLAND: Just like her mistress.

GRACE: In a wife that is not always a compliment.

HARLAND: It complements me well enough. Give me your hand.

HARLAND HELPS GRACE INTO THE COACH, CLIMBS IN AFTER.

THE COACH CLATTERS INTO MOTION, PASSES ON THE STREET MURMURING PEDESTRIANS
AND THE OCCASIONAL OTHER COACH.

HARLAND: To Saint Nicholas.

JAMIE: No safer place right now away from Jerusalem.

HARLAND: Well then, Grace, you must compliment that Whig Thameson, if you see him, for his efforts.

GRACE: (LAUGHS) I will be careful, nonetheless.

HARLAND: Perhaps Jamie should stay with you?

GRACE: I think he would do more good with you on the black road than in a church.

JAMIE: I wouldn't mind some distance between me and the city anyway.

HARLAND: At least he could keep an eye on you, in case you take ill.

GRACE: I'll be fine!

HARLAND: Yes, of course. What am I doing? You're a responsible woman. You deserve more respect than I give you.

GRACE: Don't say that.

HARLAND: Why not?

JAMIE: Saint Nicholas, sir, madam!

THE CARRIAGE DRAWS STILL.

GRACE: Because I was just thinking the same thing about you.

SHE DISEMBARKS.

HARLAND: Goodbye, my love!

GRACE: Goodbye.

JAMIE: Heyah!

THE HORSE CARRIES THEM AWAY.

SCENE 10: THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

THE NOISES OF THE CITY ARE CONQUERED BY A HISS OF WIND THROUGH GRASS AND

TREES. THEIR COACH CREAKS AS IT TRUNDLES SLOWLY THROUGH THE MUD.

HARLAND: How about you let me take over for a spell?

JAMIE: That shouldn't be necessary, sir. I think we're almost there. There are lamps ahead. No, wait.

HARLAND: What is it?

JAMIE: Torches?

HORSES' HOOVES POUND THE GROUND IN THE DISTANCE. A MILITARY TRUMPET SOUNDS. ONCE, TWICE.

CONQUEST: 'Lo!

THE COACH BEGINS TO MOVE FASTER.

HARLAND: Who are they?

CONQUEST: 'Lo, in the name of the King!

HARLAND: Jamie, slow down!

JAMIE WHIPS THE HORSE FASTER.

HARLAND: Jamie, what's wrong with you?

JAMIE: It's them! The four horsemen! From the street. We're in terrible danger!

CONQUEST: Please! We mean you no harm! Hold!

HARLAND: Jamie, for God's sake, stop at once. You'll kill us more surely than any horsemen could.

JAMIE: Not for his sake! Heyah!

ONE OF THE CART WHEELS CRUNCHES INTO A GROOVE AND SPLINTERS. THE COACH GOES TO GROUND WITH A CRASH.

ONLY THE WIND REMAINS, SPUTTERING AGAINST A FLAMING TORCH.

CONQUEST: Good lord, are you all right?

HARLAND: (GROANS) Who's there?

CONQUEST: My name is Sir Lawrence Conquest. Scottish 21st light cavalry. These are my men.

HARLAND: What's going on?

CONQUEST: You, sir, are lucky to be alive. Driving like that in the dark, what were you thinking?

HARLAND: Jamie thought that... Jamie! Is he alive?

CONQUEST: Are you alive, sir?

JAMIE GROANS.

CONQUEST: I have seen wounds far worse on the campaign. My Lieutenant will tend to his injury. Lieutenant?

DEATH: Sir!

HE DISMOUNTS.

CONQUEST: Have no fear, he is an accomplished surgeon.

HARLAND: We owe you our lives.

CONQUEST: You can repay us later. Let me help you up.

HARLAND: Thank you kindly. What are you doing out here in the middle of nowhere?

CONQUEST: Ah. We were hoping you could help us with that. We are lost.

HARLAND: Lost?

CONQUEST: We were on our way to London but became turned around in the dark.

HARLAND: Well, we're most of the way to Durham by now. Neville's Cross is probably in that direction.

CONQUEST: Splendid. Splendid. What a battle.

HARLAND: Pardon me?

CONQUEST: Just reminiscing, my good man.

HARLAND: Have you been summoned by the King? Is there a war?

CONQUEST: (LAUGHS) Not exactly. I doubt the King will ever send anyone to war.

HARLAND: God save the King.

CONQUEST: It's possible. He is less... vigorous these days than he once was. No, at the invitation of Lord Melbourne, we are preparing for - war isn't exactly the right word... a massacre.

HARLAND: Of whom?

CONQUEST: Oh, the usual group of heathens and heretics.

JAMIE GROANS.

CONQUEST: Your companion is coming to. Is not my surgeon supernatural?

HARLAND: Very impressive.

JAMIE: (GASPS) Have I died?

CONQUEST: Don't be so eager, sir. It is ungentlemanly when you owe a debt.

HARLAND: Let's have a look at you, Jamie.

JAMIE: (TREMBLING) Mr. Shiels, it *is* they! The four horsemen from my vision.

HARLAND: He was like this even before the accident, I swear. Jamie, look at me. These men are friends. They saved your life. Besides, there are only three of them.

JAMIE: The scars, the wicked eyes set deep in flesh. I know him. Any Catholic would know him.

HARLAND: Accept my apologies on behalf of my servant, good Sir.

CONQUEST: Never mind. I have been called a butcher and a demon and an angel and who knows what else on the campaign. Names do not phase me.

ANOTHER OF CONQUEST'S MEN RIDES UP. HE WHISPERS IN CONQUEST'S EAR.

CONQUEST: Splendid. My corporal has replaced the wheel on your coach. You should be able to complete your journey.

HARLAND: How can we repay you for this extraordinary kindness?

CONQUEST: You will know when the time comes. Come on men, on your way! Hip! Hip! Farewell, Harland Shiels. May God bless you before the end.

THEY JANGLE FORTH.

JAMIE: Four horsemen...

HARLAND: And a debt.

SCENE 11: RUDOLPHO'S LABORATORY

SUBSTANCES BUBBLE INSIDE POTS AND WHISTLE AS THEY TURN TO STEAM. RUDOLPHO MUTTERS TO HIMSELF AND LIFTS A LID. THE BUBBLING GROWS LOUDER.

RUDOLPHO: Transmutation. Abstraction of elements. Manifestation of previously incorporeal qualities. What is the specific heat?

HE SHUFFLES SOME PAGES.

RUDOLPHO: Yes. Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. Translational motion influences degrees of freedom in a gas.

A MINOR EXPLOSION. HE POURS SOME SUBSTANCE INTO A VESSEL AND SLURPS IT.

RUDOLPHO: Mmmm. The comedy of chemistry. Tea.

A KNOCK AT HIS DOOR.

RUDOLPHO: Go away, devils and bureaucrats! I was given until the morning to leave. Do you see the light? (LAUGHS) I am doing important work in here and won't be disturbed! (GIGGLES) Well, maybe a little.

HARLAND: (OFF) Rudolpho, is that you?

RUDOLPHO: An excellent question.

HARLAND: Can I come in?

RUDOLPHO: (SUSPICIOUS) Are you Jeroboam?

HARLAND: It's Harland Shiels. Your old student, remember?

RUDOLPHO: Good Lord, are you old already? Certainly, come in. The old are welcome here. The new are not.

THE DOOR CREAKS OPEN AND SHUT.

HARLAND: Rudolpho! I say, what a laboratory!

RUDOLPHO: Shhh! Did you come alone?

HARLAND: Uh, my footman is in the courtyard with the coach.

RUDOLPHO: A wise man. He might have been beset by porters. They are everywhere, you know. Knocking.

HARLAND: Really? There didn't seem to be anyone about on my way up. The place seems quite abandoned at the moment.

RUDOLPHO: Abandoned of scruples, certainly.

HARLAND: Rudolpho, I would ordinarily love to chat about the University, but I don't have much time.

RUDOLPHO: None of us have much time, my dear fellow. That is what being old means.

HARLAND: I just want to know about the darkness.

RUDOLPHO: What about it?

HARLAND: Do you know what has caused it?

RUDOLPHO: Yes.

HARLAND: Has the Earth left its orbit?

RUDOLPHO: No.

HARLAND: Or a volcano covered the sky in ash?

RUDOLPHO: No.

HARLAND: Well, what caused it?

RUDOLPHO: It doesn't matter! (BURSTS OUT LAUGHING) Isn't that hilarious!

HARLAND: How can you say that?

RUDOLPHO: A much more interesting query. Have you much knowledge of the anatomy?

HARLAND: Listen to me! Back in Newcastle, there are people who honestly think the apocalypse is upon us. Tell me. Is it?

RUDOLPHO: In a sense. In several senses.

HE SNIFFS AT THE AIR.

HARLAND: You're completely insane!

RUDOLPHO: I know! (LAUGHING) Tea?

HARLAND: Rudolpho, I don't have time for tea. I think I'm losing Grace to madness.

RUDOLPHO FINDS THIS HILARIOUS.

HARLAND: It's only a matter of time before people start to panic in Newcastle. I'll provide entertainment as long as I can, but what I really need are answers!

RUDOLPHO: The only thing any of us can do right now is make light of the situation before it's too late. Get it? Make light of the situation! Ha ha ha ha!

RUDOLPHO'S HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER REVERBERATES OVER THE NEXT SCENE.

SCENE 12: LAUGHTER

HARLAND CLIMBS INTO HIS COACH.

JAMIE: Did you find what you were looking for, sir?

HARLAND: Let's just get back to town. We're late already. (SIGHS) It's time to make some people laugh.

JAMIE: ...Aye, sir.

HE WHIPS THE HORSE INTO MOTION.

SCENE 13: THE PANTOMIME

SOMEONE SHUSHES NOISILY AND RUDOLPHO'S LAUGHING FADES. MURMURS.

AN ORCHESTRAL FLOURISH KICKS OFF THE SHOW.

HARLAND (AS KING WILLIAM):

Halllooo! Halllloooooo! Is there anybody there? If there's anybody there, say hallloooo!

TOWNSPEOPLE: (A LITTLE TENTATIVE) Halllloooooo!

KING WILLIAM: I say, is there anyone there? Halllloooooo!

TOWNSPEOPLE: Halloo -

KING WILLIAM: Whoa! Where did you all come from? Maybe *you* can help me. I'm looking for a little boy. Any little boy will do. Are there any little boys out there?

THE TOWNSPEOPLE CHUCKLE NERVOUSLY.

KING WILLIAM: It's not what you think! You see, I'm looking for a son.

TOWNSPEOPLE: Awwww.

KING WILLIAM: So, any of you ladies will do just as well.

BOOS.

KING WILLIAM: Wait! Wait! I have a good excuse. My name is William. William IV.

LAUGHS.

KING WILLIAM: Wait! You can't laugh at me! I am Lord High Admiral of the British navy, Defender of the Faith, Duke of Brunswick, and something else I can't remember.

TOWNSPEOPLE: The King!

KING WILLIAM: What was that?

TOWNSPEOPLE The King!

KING WILLIAM: That's right! King of Hannover...

TOWNSPEOPLE: Of England!

KING WILLIAM: Really? My memory isn't what it used to be.

TOWNSPEOPLE: Yes!!

KING WILLIAM: I guess it's true what they say about fiddling with your -

WILLAM (AS QUEEN ADELAIDE):

(SHRILL) Willy!

KING WILLIAM: (OVER LAUGHS) Oh no! Here comes Dame Adelaide. Whatever you do, don't tell her where I am, or I'll have to go back to doing important things!

QUEEN ADELAIDE: Willy, where are you? Oh! How do you do! There are so many of you. Surely one of you kind souls has seen my husband? I'm sure worried about him.

TOWNSPEOPLE: He's behind you!

QUEEN ADELAIDE: Don't be ridiculous. He hasn't done that for years.

TOWNSPEOPLE: (CHUCKLES) He's behind you!

QUEEN ADELAIDE: Now hold on just one moment... I know what you're up to! You just want a look at me bum.

TOWNSPEOPLE: He's behind you!!

QUEEN ADELAIDE: (GIGGLES) Well, just this once. Oh! William! What are you doing back there?

KING WILLIAM: There was a very nice view.

LAUGHS.

QUEEN ADELAIDE: I knew you'd pop up sooner or later.

KING WILLIAM: It wasn't that nice!

QUEEN ADELAIDE: William, you've got to come with me back to Buckingham before they reform everything.

KING WILLIAM: Are they renovating?

QUEEN ADELAIDE: (SIGHS) You wouldn't understand. Please come back.

KING WILLIAM: But, my love, I must have a son. (ASIDE) You can see why that wasn't working.

LAUGHING.

QUEEN ADELAIDE: But how, my darling? You know I can't have children.

KING WILLIAM: I shall search for one, high and low. Not just any son, but the perfect son. I wonder, are any of the little boys out there the perfect son? Come on and say it.

TOWNSPEOPLE (BOYS): Me! (Some "not me"s too!)

KING WILLIAM: A prince should be a gallant and strong lad, tall, industrious and manly, with a good voice, like the hero in a play.

LITTLE GIRL (AS PRINCIPAL BOY):

Hello! That's me.

QUEEN ADELAIDE: Why hello little boy.

KING WILLIAM: What was that you said?

LITTLE GIRL: I am the perfect son.

KING WILLIAM: Don't be silly.

LITTLE GIRL: Oh please! The hero deserves a joke or two.

KING WILLIAM: I forbid it.

LITTLE GIRL: What are you, my father?

LAUGHTER.

LITTLE GIRL: Let me explain... (SINGS) "In our fourth William's fickle days,"

KING WILLIAM: Hey!

LITTLE GIRL: (MUSIC ACCOMPANIES, A BALLAD) "A tryst of sorts, story says,"

KING WILLIAM: Hey!

QUEEN ADELAIDE: Stand up for your King, Newcastle!

LITTLE GIRL: "Took place near Rochdale, far away"

TOWNSPEOPLE ETC: Hey!

LITTLE GIRL: "With a dame whose manner was gay"

TOWNSPEOPLE: Hey!

THE SONG BECOMES UNINTELLIGIBLE AS HARLAND AND WILLIAM EXIT BACKSTAGE.

HARLAND: Huzzah! I say, it seems to be going rather well, doesn't it?

WILLAM: Are you joking? It's the best play since Shakespeare.

HARLAND: Do you think the audience has forgotten about the darkness, yet?

WILLAM: They seem to be genuinely enjoying themselves.

BOOS AND HISSES DRIFT OUT FROM THE AUDIENCE.

HARLAND: Hold on a moment, the baddie isn't due out yet, is he?

WILLAM: I suppose that depends on your definition.

REVEREND YOUNG: (NERVOUS, ON STAGE) Given its unfortunate content, by order of the Church of England, this play is to be halted at once and subsequent performances canceled.

BOOS, ANGRY SHOUTS, ESCALATING.

REVEREND YOUNG: (SHOUTING OVER) My apologies, but you're all going to have to go home now.

HARLAND: Reverend Young?

REVEREND YOUNG: (HESITANT) Oh, Harland. I'm sorry about this. I truly am, but it has to be this way.

HARLAND: What's going on?

REVEREND YOUNG: Please try and understand, Harland. This isn't a time to be undermining peoples' confidence.

THE CROWD IS GETTING IMPATIENT, ROWDY.

REVEREND YOUNG: I'm sorry. The show cannot go on. I promise to compensate you and your players for the inconvenience.

HARLAND: Wait! What about entertaining the city? Wasn't that what you wanted? Finding joy in one's darkest moments - didn't you say that? What's happened?

REVEREND YOUNG: I'm sorry; it's out of my hands now.

HARLAND: Out of your hands! Then whose... Thameson! That's it, isn't it? I was embarrassing the crown and you folded like the puppet you are.

A BOTTLE OF SOMETHING SMASHES ONTO STAGE.

WILLAM: Harland, watch out!

AN ANGRY CHEER FROM THE AUDIENCE.

WILLAM: We've got to get out of here.

REVEREND YOUNG: I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

WILLAM: Harland!

THE MOB SURGES OVER ONTO THE STAGE, AN ANGRY RUMBLE. FIGHTS BREAK LOOSE, BANGS AND SPLINTERS AS MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS BECOME BRIEF WEAPONS.

SCENE 14: IN THE STREET

A FIRE IN THE STREET. FOOTSTEPS THUNDER PAST TOWARDS THE DIMMER SOUND OF RIOTING SOMEWHERE DISTANT.

HARLAND: Jesus Christ. Jesus.

CRIER: Hear ye! Hear ye!

HARLAND PANTS.

CRIER: You! I remember you!

HARLAND: Oh no.

CRIER: Thought you had rid of me, hadn't you?

HARLAND: I don't have time for this.

CRIER: I remember how this works, yes. You don't want to hear it. You're a busy man. (LAUGHS) Oh yes, a serious man.

HARLAND: For God's sake.

CRIER: No! Not for his. (LAUGHS INSANELY) You don't have the right, after you broke my nose.

HARLAND: Look, I'm sorry. I just want to get back home to my wife.

CRIER: Not so tough now are you - without your lady friend?

HARLAND: Please, let me go.

CRIER: "Let me go!" The sinner wants pity! They all do. Let me go - where? To hell. (SPITS)

HARLAND: I'm warning you.

CRIER: (LAUGHS) I'm warning *you*! You're going to hell, Harland Shiels. You will burn, burn, in the fires of torment. (THE FIRE IN THE STREET CONTINUES TO ROAR) May your home be swept away by God's wrath and your wife ravaged and your children wasted by plague. Curse you, fiend. Curse you to suffer!

THEY STRUGGLE IN THE STREET. HARLAND CHOKES.

CRIER: (LAUGHING) Or die, and be spared!

A GUNSHOT. THE CRIER GURGLES OUT ONE LAST LAUGH.

JAMIE: Master Harland. I thought you could use a hand this time.

HARLAND: (GASPING FOR BREATH) Oh God, thank you. Jamie!

JAMIE: Are you all right, sir?

HARLAND: I'll live. Ugh. Listen, you've got to fetch the coach as fast as you can and pick up Grace. We're leaving. Now.

JAMIE: And the body?

HARLAND: Leave it to burn. And Jamie?

JAMIE: Aye, sir?

HARLAND: You can keep the rifle.

JAMIE: (PLEASED) Aye, sir.

SCENE 15: FLIGHT

GRACE DRAGS A CHESTFUL OF BELONGINGS ALONG THE STREET. THE CHURCH BELLS TOLL ANGRILY OVERHEAD.

HARLAND: Come on, Grace! Let's go! That stuff is just going to slow us down.

GRACE: If you want to survive, then you had better help me lift this into the compartment.

HARLAND: I hope that means there's food and water inside.

GRACE: (ANGRILY) Not necessarily. Now come on!

THEY LIFT IT TOGETHER.

GRACE: Fine. Now, get in.

HARLAND: Times *are* changing. Would you prefer to take the reins?

JAMIE: I would be happy to take them, sir.

HARLAND: Not after last time, I think.

GRACE: Let's go!

HARLAND: Heyah!

HE CRACKS THE WHIP AND THE COACH QUICKLY STARTS TO MOVE.

WILLAM: Wait!

GRACE: Willam, is that you?

WILLAM: (RUNNING ALONGSIDE) Don't leave! Harland, come back and we'll do another show. Look - ha! I fixed the parrot, just like you asked me to...

HARLAND: The show's over, Willam. Remember? The church took care of that.

WILLAM: Harland, it's not their fault. King William has not long left to live.

HARLAND: Rumours.

WILLAM: Reverend Young told me before they... before he... For God's sake, Harland, can't you forgive him?

HARLAND: He was a puppet and a hypocrite. Heyah!

WILLAM: (PANTING) What happened to helping ... the people of Newcastle? Come back ... we can start again ... write a new play ... keep the peace ... We need you here ... I need you ... Harland please!

HARLAND: Heyah!

WILLAM: (FALLING BEHIND) Grace! What about you? You wouldn't just leave me! You and I, we're more than just friends. Don't you care about that, even after -

GRACE: Goodbye, Willam.

HARLAND: Heyah!

WILLIAM:

Wait!

WILLIAM CAN'T KEEP UP. THE CLATTER OF THE COACH FADES SLOWLY OUT, ONLY TO BE REPLACED BY THE DISTANT SOUND OF RIOTING AND FIRES.

END OF EPISODE 1