ACT TWO | SCENE 8 | ECCLEFECHAN

Interior windy old farmhouse, Ecclefechan, Scotland. Jane Carlyle is tidying in the living area. Thomas Carlyle shouts from off stage left in his strong Scottish accent.

THOMAS
Aaarrgh!

Crash of pots.

JANE
What have you done...?!!

THOMAS
This infernal satanic witches brew you call porridge...!

JANE
I offered to help...

More pots crash off stage.

THOMAS
Damn you..!

JANE
Damn you back...!

THOMAS
Damn you to eternal damnation...!

Knock on the door.

THOMAS
(still off)
Blast and begorrah! Who is it...?

Enter Jane opens the door stage right, we see a man with a case in it’s entrance.

PIANO TUNER
(jolly)
I’ve koom for the piano, mum

JANE
Oh yes! (shouting toward T) It’s the piano man.
(to the PT) Do come in

THOMAS
Not the blighted piano again...!
JANE
It hasn’t been tuned in fourteen years...

THOMAS
(off, still shouting)
What have you done with my notes on Mirabeau...?!

JANE
(to the piano tuner)
At last, some pleasant company...

Piano man enters and begins tuning in the living area. Piano man plays first few notes and sings:

PIANO TUNER
BE KIND TO AULD GRANNIE, FOR NOO
SHE IS FRAIL,
AS A TIME SHATTER'D TREE BENDING
LOW IN THE GALE

THOMAS
Pipe down!

Jane exits up the stairs (back of stage). Piano man keeps tuning and singing...

PIANO TUNER
BE KIND TO AULD GRANNIE, FOR NOO SHE IS FRAIL...

THOMAS
(still off)
For the sake of Christ Almighty
and all his superannuated
archangels, God in heaven...!

Piano tuner keeps tuning, trying to be quieter. Loud knock on the door then the sound of a crash of books, furniture falling off stage.

THOMAS
Aargggh...!

Jane re-enters the living area to open the door. We see Algernon de Bottom, a country squire wearing a deerstalker, holding a shotgun over his arm.

ALGERNON
Hello, I’m sorry to trouble you
ma’am but may I speak to the man of the house…

JANE
(shrieking)
Thom-AAAAS!

THOMAS
Whaaaat!

JANE
(angrily)
It’s for YOU…!

Piano man keeps tuning and singing...

PIANO TUNER
BE KIND TO AULD GRANNIE, FOR NOO SHE IS FRAIL...

ALGERNON
What a charming little cottage...

Enter Thomas looking red faced and dishevelled, stares at Algernon then approaches him, Jane stands back from the door.

ALGERNON
How do you do? (offers his hand).
Batshett.

THOMAS
(Looking him up and down)
Carlyle...

ALGERNON
I was remarking to your good woman...

Thomas turns to see Jane walking off in a huff SL.

ALGERNON
I say, Carlyle, is it? I notice your several acres on the west of Craigenputtock border on my estate.. And I was wondering, well, let’s say, I was rather hoping, you’d allow me the liberty..I mean, the privilege, of shooting... whatever’s on it...
THOMAS
There are poor Irish folk wander
these moors...

ALGERNON
I mean only the game... partridges,
etcetera, and certain small
mammals...

Piano tuner continues in the background... Thomas turns to
him.

THOMAS
Bottle up, man!

PIANO TUNER
Almost done, sir...

Algernon produces a £5 note. Thomas looks at it, then looks
up Algernon.

THOMAS
Only the game mind you...

Grabs and pockets the note.

ALGERNON
That’s terribly kind of you. I’ll
try not to make a nuisance of
myself.

Thomas slams the door in his face. Jane re-enters startled
by the noise.

THOMAS
Five pounds!

JANE
By rights it should be mine!

THOMAS
(pleased with himself)
But I am in possession...!

Piano tuner gets up to leave, Jane pays him.

PIANO TUNER
Thank ye kindly, mum..

Piano tuner opens the door, exits, the wind howls. Door
closes. Silence at last. Carlyle begins to walk up the
stairs to his study, Jane turns and plays a few notes on
piano. We hear a gentle tap on the door. Both stop to look at the door then ignore it. Knock repeats louder this time.

Carlyle at the end of his tether walks off up the stairs.

THOMAS
I’m in the middle of the French Revolution, and this is Piccadilly Circus on a Friday night...!!

Jane calmly opens the door.

WALDO
Mrs Carlyle?

JANE
Yes? And you are...?

WALDO
Ralph Waldo Emerson, an admirer.

JANE
An American?!

WALDO
Yes!

JANE
...to see him?

WALDO
To see the great scholar nourishing his heart amid these desolate heathery hills.

Jane stares at Waldo in disbelief and confusion she calls up the stairs.

JANE
Thomas...? 

Carlyle storms back downstairs making a beeline for the door.

THOMAS
Lord return me peace and tranquility!

Waldo, a little worried, quickly shows her a note.

WALDO
Uh... I have a letter of introduction from a Mr Mill
THOMAS
(Thomas slows and approaches the door)
John Stuart Mill the man with no soul? You are not here to peddle his laissez faire liberalism are you?

WALDO
Not at all, sir. My name is Ralph Waldo Emerson, I have read every word you have written, sir. And there is not one I disagree with.

THOMAS
And you are a…?

WALDO
I was a preacher. Now I am a simple seeker after truth...

THOMAS
Are they not one and the same thing?

WALDO
There is more truth in your *Sartor Resartus* than in a thousand Boston sermons.

THOMAS
(mellow now)
Well, then... You must be as insane as a sackful of serpents, twice as dangerous and five times as hungry...!

He shakes Waldo’s hand vigorously.

THOMAS
Come in, come in... My wife, the harridan, the vixen, the Jezebel, the shrew. But you may call her Jane.

They nod to one another, you feel an instant connection between W & J.

THOMAS
Now, why are you here?
WALDO
I would have gone to Germany to see the great Goethe if he had lived a year longer. But I came for Coleridge, the visionary...

THOMAS
Coleridge! Never did I see such apparatus got ready for thinking, and never so little thought.

WALDO
And Wordsworth who put poetry in the mouth of the common man...

THOMAS
Ha! Did you notice the languid way in which he gives you a handful of numb unresponsive fingers...? He is a bell with a wooden tongue...

Bang! Gunshot from outside interrupts Carlyle in full flow.

WALDO
What was that?

THOMAS
The idle aristocracy...

JANE
I fear for the piano tuner... Come please sit.

THOMAS
So what are your impressions of Merry Olde England?

WALDO
(embarrassed)
It is not quite the rustic garden of my expectations.

THOMAS
As if that rustic vision was ever anything other than a dream!

Jane and Thomas exchange looks. Jane sits down at the piano to play:
MERRIE OLDE ENGLAND

JANE

D             A          G               A
IN MERRIE OLD ENGLAND THE HEDGEROWS WERE GREEN
D             A          G               A
THE ROADS WERE DUSTY BUT THE RIVERS WERE CLEAN
D             A          G               A
WILD ROSES BLOOMED ON EACH THATCHED COUNTRY COTTAGE

D             A          G               A
AND THE CHIMNEY POT SMOKE SMELLED OF SIZZLING PORK SAUSAGE
D             A          G               A
UP HILL AND DOWN DALE SWEET BIRDSONG PREVAILED
D             A          G               A
WITH YOUR ROAST BEEF ON SUNDAY YOU COULD STILL
D             A          G               A
BUY AN ALE FOR A PENNY A PINT AT
D             A          G               A
AT YE OLDE COUNTRY INN

D             G           A          Gb         A7
WHERE THE BIG-BELLIED LANDLORD WORE A JOLLY BIG GRIN

D             A          G               A
NOW THE FIDDLES ARE SILENT AND THE MAYPOLES ARE STILL
D             A          G               A
WHERE ONCE THERE WERE BLUEBELLS THERE’S A NEW COTTON MILL
D             A          G               A
AND THE BOYS AND THE GIRLS WHO PLAYED HERE IN SPRING

THOMAS

Dm           A7         Gm           A7
ARE YOKED TO THE FRAMES THAT MAKE LACE FOR THE KING
Dm           A7         Gm           A7
THE ROADS ARE RIVERS OF SCUM BLACK AS INK
Dm           A7         Gm           A7
WHERE THERE ONCE WAS A RIVER THERE’S ONLY A STINK

D          Db           Gbm         Gbdim
NOW MERRIE OLDE ENGLAND MUST COVER HER NOSE
D          Db
WITH A KERCHIEF THAT SMELLS OF A DEAD ENGLISH ROSE

JANE

THOMAS

Gbmb          Db          D          Db
NOW MERRIE OLDE ENGLAND HAS TEARS IN HER EYES
Gbmb          Db          D          Db
FROM THE SOOT THAT WEEPS FROM THE SMOKE-FILLED SKIES
AND THE FAT JOLLY LANDLORD WITH THE BIG BEAMING GRIN
HANGS FROM A BEAM IN YE OLDE COUNTRY INN.

THE THATCHED COUNTRY COTTAGE THAT OUR HEARTS SO ENRAPTURED
IS A SLUM OR A FACTORY, IRRETRIEVABLY THATCHED...

YES, FROM THAT MOMENT ON WE’RE OBLIGED TO DEDUCT
THAT MERRIE OLDE ENGLAND WAS WELL AND TRULY...
IRREVOCABLY, FINALLY AND TOTALLY NOT SO UNIVERSALLY MERRY...

NOW THE SOUND THAT YOU HEAR FROM THE DERELICT SLUMS
IS THE RAT-A-TAT-TAT OF DISTANT, OF DISTANT DRUMS...