

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Monty/Miss Shingle

At rise, we find MONTY NAVARRO in a Prison Cell. The ninth, and current, Earl of Highhurst, HE is youthful and quite dashing, even under such circumstances. HE sits down at a writing desk and takes a sheaf of papers out of the drawer. HE lifts a pen and begins to write.

#1b – Our Story Begins

MONTY (Recorded V-O)

(As HE writes:)

Pentonville Prison. Nineteenth of October, nineteen hundred and nine. This is the memoir, and perhaps final confession, of Lord Navarro, ninth Earl of Highhurst. It is a fact of life that no one ever really tells the truth about himself. But in the event of my execution, while I still have time, I have decided to leave behind a purely factual record of events. I suppose one could call it "A Gentleman's Guide... To Murder."

(After a moment:)

Or should I say – "Love and Murder." My story begins, as stories often do, with a quite unexpected visitor.

SCENE 1A

(MONTY enters a small sad Parlor, decorated to make the most of meager means. His affect is much younger, his manner far less assured.

Grieving, HE gazes at a portrait of his mother. The doorbell clangs rather insistently. MONTY opens the door and MARIETTA SHINGLE, an eccentric woman of a certain age, barges in from the cold. MUSIC fades out.)

MISS SHINGLE

If there's a sorrier street in all of Clapham, I'm sure I've never seen it.

MONTY

Pardon me, madam, but do we know one another?

(MISS SHINGLE removes her outer garments, making herself quite at home.)

MISS SHINGLE

Only since the moment you were given birth by your sweet mother.

MONTY

You knew Mother? I... I've only just returned from her funeral.

MISS SHINGLE

My poor dear Isabel, bless her soul.

(Grabs his face affectionately.)

Look at himself, all grown up and handsome as the devil.

(MISS SHINGLE takes a seat, exhausted from her journey.)

MONTY

How is it you knew Mother, Missus... ?

MISS SHINGLE

Miss. Shingle. Marietta Shingle... ?

MONTY

Of course! Miss Shingle! She spoke of you often—and how she looked forward to your letters!

MISS SHINGLE

And I hers, I assure you.

(Removing her hat.)

You were going to offer me a spot of tea, were you?

MONTY

You must forgive my manners, Miss Shingle. Mother always had a kettle on.

MISS SHINGLE

And if you could spare a biscuit or two, I'm sure I wouldn't mind.

(MISS SHINGLE takes in the faded gentility of the parlor for the first time and shakes her head sadly.)

I knew you and your mother were having a rough time of it, but I didn't know it had come to this. Have you any prospects, love?

MONTY

Mother always dreamt I should go to Oxford or Cambridge somehow.

(Realizing sadly.)

It seems rather unlikely now.

MISS SHINGLE

There's nothing your mother wouldn't have done for you.

MONTY

I hardly know how I shall go on without her.

MISS SHINGLE

(SHE eyes him admiringly.)

You rather favor your father... physically, I mean.

MONTY

Did you know my father? He died when I was but seven.

MISS SHINGLE

Only met him once, love. Castilian, you know. As dashing a face and figure as you will ever see.

(A heavy sigh.)

Tell me, love, what do you know of your *mother's* family?

MONTY

Mother never spoke of them. Must've been curs and mountebanks. Horse thieves, at the very least.

MISS SHINGLE

Well, not exactly. Have you heard of the D'Ysquith family?

(MUSIC starts under scene.)

#2 - You're a D'Ysquith

MONTY

The D'Ysquiths? Why, yes, of course, hasn't everyone?

MISS SHINGLE

Then you've heard of Highhurst Castle?

MONTY

Of course.

MISS SHINGLE

You're aware, then, of their position? Their vast wealth and influence?

MONTY

Yes, yes, what's it got to do with me?

MISS SHINGLE

(Singing:)

YOU'RE A D'YSQUITH...

MONTY

What?

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