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The Turn of the Screw

A Play

Ken Whitmore

Adapted from the story by
Henry James

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THE TURN OF THE SCREW

First presented at the Coliseum Theatre, Oldham, on
6th November, 1982, with the following cast:

Flora	Amanda Sutcliffe
Miss Grey	Denise Armon
Miles	Ian Lawson
Mrs Grose	Anne Rye
Mr Crimond	Alan Cody
Peter Quint	Alan Cody
Miss Jessel	Janet Amsbury

The play was directed by Pat Trueman

The action takes place in the sitting-room/hall of Bly, a
large country house in Essex, and extends over a period of
five months—from June to October, 1875

ACT I

PROLOGUE	Shortly before dawn
SCENE 1	An afternoon in June
SCENE 2	An afternoon in July
SCENE 3	A morning in August
SCENE 4	3 a.m. on a September morning

ACT II

SCENE 1	An afternoon in October
SCENE 2	Two hours later—evening
SCENE 3	The next day. Late afternoon
SCENE 4	The next day. Late afternoon

CHARACTERS

Flora, aged 8
Miss Grey, 20
Miles, 10
Mrs Grose, 50
Mr Crimond, 35
Quint, 35
Miss Jessel, 28

The parts of Mr Crimond and Quint may be doubled

ACT I

The scene is the sitting-room/hall (known as the great hall) of Bly, a large country house in Essex. It is June, 1875

From the hall a staircase runs up L to a landing fronted by an oak balustrade. Two bedroom doors at least should be seen and the upper floors given an air of infinite spaciousness. On the ground floor are two doors on the right side of the hall and one door on the left. These lead R to the dining-room and little hall and L to the schoolroom. At the back facing the audience is a big bow-shaped window opening on to a terrace with steps leading down to parkland. The furniture is very fine and of the period and includes a desk, a chaise-longue, a sideboard, a low table and a grandfather clock. There is an oil lamp on the desk

PROLOGUE

The CURTAIN rises on the empty room in a pre-dawn gloom with the barest hint of light in the sky seen through the open-curtained window. There is a flicker of lightning, then a far-away grumble of thunder, then the window swings slowly open of its own volition. A man's figure, (Quint), is seen on the threshold. He moves slowly into the room, then turns his head to gaze towards the top of the stairs. Now a female figure, (Miss Jessel), is seen gliding down. She stops halfway and gazes at the man. He holds out his arms and she comes down and takes his hand. They walk out through the window and it slowly closes behind them. More lightning and thunder, then the Lights fade to a Black-out

SCENE 1

It is a brilliant sunny afternoon. The hall is empty

Flora is heard laughing and then she flings open the door from the little hall and runs in. She opens her arms in welcome to somebody in the little hall

Flora And this is the great hall. Come and see. Come—come.

Miss Grey enters and looks about in wonder. Miles comes in and takes her by the hand. Mrs Grose and Mr Crimond come in and stand watching at the door

(*Going to the window*) It's a lovely room. It fills up with sun. And there's the park and our old pony. And down there—ever so far—the lake where we go boating and have our picnics.

Miss Grey, hand in hand with Miles, goes to the window. Flora runs to the schoolroom door and opens it

And this is the schoolroom, Miss Grey. This is where you'll teach me tables and French and drawing. Come and see.

Miss Grey goes and looks in

The big geographical globe and the old piano. Miles plays the piano—don't you, Miles?—but I can't.

Miss Grey You never learned?

Flora No, I was too tired.

Miss Grey It's never too late. We must see if we can wake you up.

Flora (*taking Miss Grey's hand and leading her up the first stair*) Come on—I'll show you the bedrooms and our great dark tower. Come—come.

Crimond Flora, my dear.

Flora Yes, Uncle?

Crimond Don't run Miss Grey off her feet before she's even made up her mind to stay.

Flora (*to Miss Grey*) But you are staying, aren't you?

Mrs Grose Lord bless—we certainly hope so!

Crimond Mrs Grose, you're as bad as the children. Miss Grey mustn't be rushed and pushed. And Flora.

Flora Yes, Uncle?

Crimond How do you propose showing Miss Grey the tower when it's permanently locked and barred and sealed?

Miles Flora means we'll show Miss Grey the *staircase* leading to the tower. (*Pointing upstairs for Miss Grey's benefit*) It's just to the right up there—off the main landing.

Miss Grey (*amused*) This tower sounds highly mysterious.

Crimond The only mystery, my dear Miss Grey, is money. We had to close it off in the name of economy. (*Clapping to make the children move*) Now off you go, children, and don't detain our visitor more than five minutes. I must be off soon and Miss Grey and I have important matters to discuss.

Flora Yes, us!

And together with Miss Grey and Miles she goes off upstairs

Crimond Well—is she suitable?

Mrs Grose She's perfect. I only hope she finds *us* suitable.

Crimond Yes, she's the last scrape of a very deep barrel.

Mrs Grose The children have certainly taken to her.

Crimond Yes, and she to them, thank goodness. They're our best weapon, of course. Our young friend burns to be a little mother.

Mrs Grose You read the ladies like a book, sir.

Crimond It comes from long and concentrated study.

Mrs Grose Must you leave us so soon? Master Miles has only been home from school three or four hours and I know he's dying to have a talk with you.

Crimond Good Lord, is he? Sorry, I've an urgent engagement in town. (*He goes to the stairs and calls*) Miles—Flora!

Mrs Grose I don't believe that school suits him, sir.

Crimond Oh? Has the boy been belly-aching?

Mrs Grose Never, sir, he's a little gentleman in miniature. But he climbed out of that carriage this morning so pale and pinched. He was really down.

Crimond Then you must build him up. Bengers, Mrs Grose. Bengers.

Mrs Grose Yes, sir.

Crimond And what about Flora?

Mrs Grose Oh, happy as a lark, sir, as you've just seen with your own eyes.

Miss Grey and the children descend the stairs

Flora Miss Grey kept saying, "Is there more—is there more?" And Miles said, "We've only made a start—just wait till we go on a proper tour—you'll be amazed."

Crimond Yes, that's a thrill in store for the future, but now I must have the lady to myself for a moment. So shoo—off with the pair of you. Thank you, Mrs Grose.

Mrs Grose and the children go out to the little hall

(*To Miss Grey*) Well—and what do you make of Bly?

Miss Grey I can hardly say, sir. It's so big and beautiful. All those enormous empty rooms and long corridors and crooked staircases. It's like a castle out of a fairytale.

Crimond No, it's big and it's ugly and it's antique. But it is convenient, most of it. You might have noticed a few features of a building still older.

Miss Grey Of course.

Crimond Such as the tower. Quite useless, I'm afraid, but jolly picturesque.

Miss Grey But lovely! I had the strangest feeling as we wandered about the upper floors.

Crimond Do tell.

Miss Grey I felt the children and I were lost, like a handful of passengers in a great drifting ship.

Crimond Splendid! Because I'm offering you the helm.

Miss Grey I beg your pardon, sir?

Crimond I'm offering you supreme authority over this great ship and all who sail in her.

Miss Grey I? But surely Mrs Grose is in charge.

Crimond Mrs Grose is the first mate—the housekeeper. And there are plenty of other hands to help—cook—housemaid—dairywoman—old pony—old groom—old gardener. But the lady I appoint governess will command the ship. Well, how are your sea legs?

Miss Grey Sir, I'm barely twenty. This would be my first position. This morning I came up to London in a great flutter to answer your

advertisement in the *Church Times*. And before I know where I am you whisk me to the depths of the countryside and propose placing me in charge of a great house.

Crimond (*amused*) The depths of the countryside? What — the wild and drear regions of nethermost Essex? Miss Grey, I detect in you a tremendous tendency to romanticize. No, don't be offended. I like it. And Bly will fit you like a glove.

Miss Grey But they're such serious duties. And this really is a place of very great loneliness, compared with what I've known.

Crimond (*glancing at his watch*) To become sordid for one moment, I offer twice the normal remuneration.

Miss Grey (*amazed*) I beg your pardon?

Crimond Twice the normal salary.

Miss Grey Twice? But why?

Crimond Great heavens, now I've alarmed you. To be plain: I like you — the children like you — Mrs Grose likes you. We throw ourselves on your sweet mercy. (*He takes her hand*)

Miss Grey (*pulling away*) Please, sir!

Crimond Miss Grey, you see before you a desperate man.

Miss Grey Desperate?

Crimond And that's an understatement. Two years ago my brother and his wife died in India — thank you, it was sad. And I woke up one morning to find myself the guardian of a small nephew and niece — I — a lone man without a jot of experience or a grain of patience. Well, Miss Grey, it's all been a tremendous worry and I've made a series of shocking blunders. You see, I pity the poor chicks most awfully, and of course I've done all I could. I sent them down here to my country place with the best people I could find to look after them. I even parted with my own servants to wait on them. Whenever I can I run down myself to see how they're faring. But the blessed thing is, you see, they have no other relations in the world and my own affairs take up all my time. In the beginning I had the luck to find an outstanding young lady to teach them, and all went swimmingly until — well — very sadly she went and died on us.

Miss Grey Oh, I am sorry.

Crimond Yes, and so are we. But that, of course, meant little Miles had to go off to school. And since then Mrs Grose has done all she can for Flora — in the way of manners and things — she's quite hopeless with the academic side. So you see, we really are in desperate need of — well — in a word — of you, Miss Grey. And so I throw myself at your feet. I'd be eternally grateful.

Pause

Miss Grey I can hardly refuse.

Crimond (*surprised*) You can't?

Miss Grey I fear not.

Crimond Miss Grey, I wish you a hundred years of life and a bag of gold. Now there's only one condition attached to this post.

Miss Grey A condition?

Crimond Just one—that you never get in touch with me.

Miss Grey But sir——

Crimond That you never trouble me—but never, never. You must neither appeal nor complain nor write to me about anything. You must meet all questions yourself, receive all moneys from my solicitor, and take the whole thing over and let me alone.

Miss Grey But, Mr Crimond——

Crimond Just yes or no. I must be off in one minute.

Miss Grey But, sir! (*She undergoes a great struggle, then sighs*) Very well. I agree to your condition.

Crimond Splendid! The bounty and the benison of heaven reward you. Now before I go, just promise me one thing.

Miss Grey What? There's more?

Crimond One final favour. Don't go. Stay here tonight.

Miss Grey Stay? But how can I? My belongings—my trunk—my clothes——

Crimond Can be sent up from Hampshire in a day—and your reverend father and your charming sisters acquainted with your new place in life at the same time. Until then Mrs Grose will provide all you need.

Miss Grey Well—I——

Crimond Good! It's done. Shake. (*He clasps her hand*) You know, it's been an education to meet you, but now I must fly. I've a pressing engagement in Harley Street. No, don't accompany me to the door. Mrs Grose will see me on my way. (*At the door of the little hall he remembers something, pats his pockets, and withdraws a sealed envelope*) I was forgetting. A letter from the lad's headmaster. Dreadful boring man. All chalk and sermons. I don't possess the patience to open it. (*Handing it over*) You open it. Read him—deal with him. But remember, not a word to me. It's all yours. Good-day, goodbye, good luck and thank you.

Crimond exits to the little hall

Miss Grey gazes after him in bewilderment and infatuation. Then she puts the letter on the desk, takes off her hat, and walks about touching the various treasures of which she is suddenly the custodian

Mrs Grose hurries in from the little hall, beaming

Mrs Grose Well, miss, so we have a new member of the family! Dear me, you don't know how happy and relieved I am!

Miss Grey Relieved? Why, is there something to fear?

Mrs Grose Fear, miss? No, miss. What makes you ask?

Miss Grey You speak as though I'd arrived at some Bluebeard's castle.

Mrs Grose Mercy! What an imagination! No, miss, it's just that having a pleasant young companion under these old rafters after all this time makes me the happiest woman the sun shines on, that's all. And the children are happy, too. They've taken a real fancy to you.

Miss Grey And I to them. They seem remarkable.

Mrs Grose Yes. Remarkable's the word. Most remarkable. Why, for good behaviour and sweetness and manners and consideration—you'll be carried away by them.

Miss Grey Yes, I'm carried away rather easily. I was carried away just now.

Mrs Grose By the master?

Miss Grey smiles and nods bashfully

Well, miss, you're not the first and I dare say you won't be the last.

Miss Grey Oh, I've no pretensions to being the only one.

Mrs Grose That's a good job.

Miss Grey (*gazing about*) This is all so amazing. I can't take it in. This morning I was the youngest sister of four at the parsonage. The baby. And now, all this. To manage the house—deal with the solicitor—open the letters—oh, there was a letter from the boy's headmaster. (*She takes up the letter from the desk and opens it*)

Miles appears at the balustrade on the landing and stands listening

But what can this mean?

Mrs Grose What is it, miss?

Miss Grey The child has been dismissed his school.

Mrs Grose But haven't they all been sent home?

Miss Grey Sent home? Yes, but only for the holidays. Miles may never go back at all.

Mrs Grose They won't take him?

Miss Grey They absolutely decline.

Mrs Grose But what has he done, the little precious?

Miss Grey offers the letter, but Mrs Grose puts her hands behind her back

I was never taught to read, miss.

Miss Grey Oh, I'm sorry. Do forgive me. Is the boy really so bad?

Mrs Grose Do the gentlemen say so?

Miss Grey (*after a glance at the letter*) They don't go into particulars. They simply say it would be impossible to keep him. And that can mean but one thing—that he's an injury to others.

Mrs Grose (*flaring up*) Master Miles? Him? An injury? Lord bless me. Why he's scarce ten years old. The dear faithful creature's as innocent as a pet dog. I tell you, miss, he's got all the virtues listed in the holy books—yes and a few more besides.

Miss Grey And you can honestly swear that you've never known him to be bad?

Pause

Mrs Grose Never? Oh, of course I don't pretend *that*.

Miss Grey You mean there have been occasions—?

Mrs Grose Oh, yes indeed, miss—thank God.

Miss Grey I see. You mean that a boy who never is bad—

Mrs Grose Is no boy for me. It wouldn't be natural.

Miss Grey I see. You like them with the spirit to be naughty? Well, so do I.
(*She reflects*) But not to the point where they contaminate.

Mrs Grose Where they what?

Miss Grey Where they corrupt, Mrs Grose.

Mrs Grose (*laughing*) Corrupt? Master Miles? Why, miss, are you afraid he'll corrupt you?

And now they both laugh—rather hollowly

Miss Grey Tell me about the lady who was here before.

Mrs Grose The last governess? Well, *she* was young and pretty too. Almost as young and almost as pretty, miss, even as you.

Miss Grey I hope her youth and beauty helped her. He seems to like us young and pretty.

Mrs Grose Oh, he certainly did. It was the way he liked everybody. (*She stops herself*) I mean the master did—does—Mr Crimond.

Miss Grey But who were you speaking of before?

Mrs Grose Why, miss, of him.

Miss Grey The master?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss. Of who else, indeed?

Miss Grey Did *she* see anything in the boy that wasn't—quite nice?

Mrs Grose She never told me so, miss.

Miss Grey Was she careful—particular?

Mrs Grose Well, miss, she's gone. I don't like to tell tales.

Miss Grey I see. At least I think I do.

A pause

Flora joins Miles on the landing

Did she die here at Bly?

Mrs Grose (*increasingly uncomfortable*) No, miss, she went off.

Miss Grey Went off? To die?

No answer

She was taken ill, you mean, and went home?

Mrs Grose She was not taken ill, miss—not so far as I could see—not in this house. She left, miss, at the end of the year, to go home, as she said, for a short—— (*she stops*)

Miss Grey A short holiday?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss.

Miss Grey And then?

Mrs Grose She never came back. Just at the very moment I was expecting her . . .

Miss Grey Well?

Mrs Grose I heard from the master that she'd gone to glory.

Miss Grey But what did she die of?

Mrs Grose (*flaring up*) How should I know! By my life, miss, master never told me! (*Repenting*) I'm sorry, miss, but speaking of it upsets me. It was all

so sudden. Please, miss, I must get back to my work. I'm well behind today.
 Begging your pardon, miss.

After an awkward curtsy, Mrs Grose hurries out to the little hall

Miss Grey, Miles and Flora gaze after her, as the Lights fade to a Black-out

SCENE 2

The same. It is towards dusk on a hot day

Flora enters from the garden carrying a big bunch of flowers. She tries to cram them into one vase, which is too small, then gives up and leaves the flowers on the table. She looks to see if anybody is coming then starts tiptoeing upstairs

Miss Grey enters from the garden with a basket of flowers. She sees Flora going upstairs and cries sharply

Miss Grey Flora—not upstairs, darling.

Flora Why not?

Miss Grey I don't wish you to go up there, that's why.

Flora comes down. Miss Grey looks about for Miles

Miles? *(She goes to the stairs)* Miles, are you up there?

Flora He's still in the garden.

Miss Grey *(calling upstairs)* Miles—are you there? *(She starts to mount)*
 Miles?

Miles enters from the garden

Miles Yes, Miss Grey?

Miss Grey turns

Miss Grey Thank heaven. *(She comes down and holds him with relief)*

Flora I told you he was in the garden.

Miss Grey Miles, promise me you won't go off on your own again like that.
 Where have you been?

Miles I found a wasps' nest. I was just looking at the wasps going in and out.
 Why?

Miss Grey Listen, both of you: I don't like you wandering off on your own—
 especially when night's coming on.

Flora Why? Are there lions and tigers in the garden?

Miles No, but there are some terrible fierce tiger-lilies.

He and Flora laugh

Would you excuse me a moment, Miss Grey? *(He goes to the stairs)* I left
 my book in my room.

Miss Grey No, Miles! Not up there.

Miles Beg pardon?

Miss Grey I don't wish you to go upstairs. Not at the moment.

Miles Could you tell me why not?

Miss Grey I'd like you to take these flowers to the kitchen and put them in water before they die. All right?

Miles Yes, of course. Come on, Flo, gather ye rosebuds while you may.

Miles and Flora gather up the flowers

Flora I do believe Miss Grey thinks there are lions and tigers upstairs.

Miss Grey Can you manage?

Miles Yes, fine. Would you mind opening the door?

Miss Grey (*opening the dining-room door*) And please tell Mrs Grose I'd like to see her right away.

Flora Yes, Miss Grey.

The children exit to the dining-room, leaving the flower-basket on the floor

Miss Grey goes to the window and closes it, then goes to the foot of the stairs and looks up, frowning

Mrs Grose enters from the dining-room

Mrs Grose Yes, miss?

Miss Grey Oh, Mrs Grose. I was just wondering—about the tower.

Mrs Grose Yes, miss?

Miss Grey Am I mistaken or is it kept locked at all times?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss, always. Why do you ask, miss?

Miss Grey At all times?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss—permanent—always.

Miss Grey You're quite sure?

Mrs Grose Well, I can only say it's never been open during my time here and that's close on fifteen years. What makes you ask?

Miss Grey holds her head for a moment

Is something wrong, miss?

Miss Grey No, I'm all right. I think I've been a little too long in the sun. Mrs Grose, how can you be so certain nobody uses the tower?

Mrs Grose Uses it? Whatever for?

Miss Grey Is there a key?

Mrs Grose A key to the tower?

Miss Grey Yes.

Mrs Grose As a matter of fact there is.

Miss Grey May I see it?

Mrs Grose You never intend going up there?

Miss Grey I'd like to see the key, that's all.

Mrs Grose goes to the desk, opens a bottom drawer and finds the key

Is that the one?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss.

Miss Grey Is it the only one?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss. Take a look at the rust. You can scrape it off with your nail. Can't have been used in years.

Miss Grey takes the key and examines it

Miss Grey It's just that when I was in the garden just now I happened to glance up and I saw a man standing on top of the tower.

Mrs Grose A man?

Miss Grey Yes.

Mrs Grose You couldn't have been mistaken?

Miss Grey You think I imagined it? A man staring down at me from the top of a tower?

Mrs Grose Staring?

Miss Grey Yes, as though I had no right to be there. As though the place belonged to him and I was an interloper. Even when he turned to go he was still staring at me.

Mrs Grose Where did he go?

Miss Grey He just turned away and — disappeared. (*She touches her head for a moment*) Or *did* I just imagine it? Some trick of the light . . .

Mrs Grose Have you perhaps a headache, miss?

Miss Grey No — yes — just a little one.

Mrs Grose (*helping her into a chair*) Better have a little sit down, miss. It's this weather. It's getting on top of all of us.

Miss Grey There can't actually have been a man, can there? Here's the key to prove it. Still, I might as well go up and make sure.

Mrs Grose No, miss!

Miss Grey Why not?

Mrs Grose I shouldn't venture up there, miss. They do say the staircase has crumbled away entirely. It was only a flimsy corkscrew thing twisting round the walls in the first place. And besides, look how dark it's getting. You wouldn't see a thing. You'd like as not break your neck. There was no man, miss. It was just a touch of the sun.

Miss Grey Yes, nothing a good night's sleep won't mend. If I can get one.

Mrs Grose You're not sleeping well?

Miss Grey It's just the strange little noises.

Mrs Grose Noises?

Miss Grey That the house makes, when it's settling down for the night.

Mrs Grose What sort of noises?

Miss Grey Oh, as if — I don't know — as if there were something astir.

Mrs Grose Something astir?

Miss Grey I suppose all old houses are the same. Once or twice I've imagined I could hear a child crying far away.

Mrs Grose Master Miles or Miss Flora. Having a little dream, bless them.

Miss Grey No, a child crying a long way off — like the wind in the trees. And I suppose that's exactly what it was. Combined with my over-active imagination. I've been rather on edge these last few days.

Mrs Grose Oh?

Miss Grey I've had some rather disturbing news from home. It unsettles one.

Mrs Grose Oh, dear, nothing serious, I hope?

Miss Grey Just little domestic troubles. But one worries, being so far away.

Mrs Grose Don't say you're thinking of leaving us, miss.

Miss Grey Good Lord, no.

Mrs Grose Thank heavens.

Miss Grey I really love Bly. I've never been so happy. You can't imagine the change from my life at home. I've got such freedom. Any woman would envy me. And the children are so alert, so responsive. They're almost too good to be true. And when they've gone off to bed and I take a turn in the grounds I get such a sense of—don't laugh at me, Mrs Grose, but I get a sense of *property*—almost as though I were *mistress* of Bly. (*Laughing at herself*) Yes, I feel as though my existence were justified at last—that by my great discretion and my quiet good sense I'm giving pleasure to the person who enticed me into coming here. Because that's what he did, you know.

Mrs Grose Mr Crimond?

Miss Grey Yes, he charmed me quite wickedly.

Mrs Grose Put you under his spell he did. I can see that.

Miss Grey I sometimes imagine, when I'm walking through the garden in the evening, that he'll suddenly appear and stand before me, and smile, and approve of all I'm doing here. That's all I'd ask. Just his approval. Nothing more.

Mrs Grose Oh, he'd be right proud of you, indeed he would. There's only one little point where he might have cause to differ.

Miss Grey Oh?

Mrs Grose I'm thinking of little Miles.

Miss Grey Miles? You mean about his school?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss, that horrible cruel charge.

Miss Grey But the charge is ludicrous. Miles cause trouble? You only have to look at him.

Mrs Grose I do, miss. I do nothing else. And I see nothing but goodness.

Miss Grey Because there's nothing else to see. His only crime is that he's too fine and fair for the nasty little school world and they've made him pay the price for it. They didn't want him there because he showed all the others up.

Mrs Grose So what do you mean to reply?

Miss Grey In answer to the headmaster? Nothing.

Mrs Grose And to his uncle?

Miss Grey Nothing.

Mrs Grose And to the boy himself?

Miss Grey (*magnificent*) Nothing.

Mrs Grose Then I'll stand by you, miss. We'll see it out together.

They shake hands

Miss Grey Together.

Mrs Grose Would it be too forward of me, miss, to——

Miss Grey To kiss me? Of course not.

They embrace

Oh, Mrs Grose, you do me so much good.

A rumble of thunder is heard

Mrs Grose Will you be all right now, if I leave you for a while?

Miss Grey I'll be fine.

Mrs Grose I'll see how my little darlings are doing with their flowers, bless them, and then give them supper and up to bed.

She exits through the dining-room door

Miss Grey picks up a letter from the desk and glances through it for the dozenth time. She examines a framed photograph of her family. She is upset. She sits down and starts writing a letter. Her attention wanders to the big rusty key. She picks it up, ponders, then goes to the stairs and starts to mount. At another rumble of thunder she stops, goes back to the desk and resumes her letter

Behind her at the window there is a flicker of lightning and Quint is staring in. Sensing his presence, Miss Grey puts down her pen, turns and gets up. They stare at one another for a long moment, then she rushes towards him but falls over the flower-basket on the floor

Quint disappears

She gets to her feet, opens the window and goes on to the terrace. When she is satisfied he is nowhere to be seen, she closes the window and stares in from the outside as he did

Mrs Grose, entering with a bowl of flowers, sees her face pressed against the window and screams and drops the bowl

Miss Grey comes in

Mrs Grose Lord bless me, miss! What's the matter? You startled the life out of me.

Miss Grey I've just seen him again.

Mrs Grose What?

Miss Grey That dreadful man—looking in—through that window.

Mrs Grose What? The same one?

Miss Grey The man on the tower.

Mrs Grose Then where is he now?

Miss Grey Goodness knows. I rushed out but he'd vanished like a——

Mrs Grose Vanished? What, again?

Miss Grey Mrs Grose, I'd like the truth from you about something, right away.

Mrs Grose Of course, miss. Would I tell you anything else?

Miss Grey Mrs Grose, is there some awful secret at Bly, about which nobody speaks?

Mrs Grose What do you mean, miss?

Miss Grey Is there some poor insane relative kept in confinement here?
Locked up in that tower?

Mrs Grose Mercy! No!

Miss Grey One who sometimes breaks free and prowls and hovers about?

Mrs Grose Prowls and hovers? God help us. No, miss, I swear.

Miss Grey Then who was it? Who is he? What does he want?

Mrs Grose Lord knows, miss. Was he a gentleman?

Miss Grey No. No!

Mrs Grose Nobody from about the house? Nobody from the village?

Miss Grey I've never set eyes on him.

Mrs Grose How long was he standing there?

Miss Grey Until I went out to meet him.

Mrs Grose Merciful powers! I couldn't have gone out.

Miss Grey Neither could I. But I did. I have my duty. I have to protect the children.

Mrs Grose What did he look like?

Miss Grey Like nobody.

Mrs Grose Nobody.

Miss Grey You want a description? All right, he wore no hat. He had red hair, very red. Good straight features. Yes, and red side whiskers. His complexion was pale, yes, unnaturally white, as white as paper. And there was something else. (*She thinks*) Yes, a birthmark. A small round birthmark on his right cheek.

Mrs. Grose (*sharply*) A birthmark?

Miss Grey Yes—about the size of a farthing. And his eyes were sharp and very strange. Rather small and fixed. Staring eyes. And his mouth was wide and thin. Of one thing I'm certain. He wasn't a gentleman.

Mrs Grose A gentleman? What? *Him* a gentleman? That was the last thing you'd call him.

Miss Grey What? You know him?

Mrs Grose Handsome? Would you call him handsome?

Miss Grey Very.

Mrs Grose And his clothes?

Miss Grey Somebody else's. They were smart but they didn't belong to him.

Mrs Grose No, they belonged to the master.

Miss Grey Mr Crimond? But you mean you do know him?

Mrs Grose Quint.

Miss Grey Quint?

Mrs Grose Peter Quint. Mr Crimond's own man. His valet when he was here.

Miss Grey When Mr Crimond was here?

Mrs Grose He never wore the master's hat, but he did wear — well, there were waistcoats missed. Both him and the master were here last year. Then the master went away and Quint was left alone.

Miss Grey What do you mean, alone?

Mrs Grose Alone with us. In charge.

Miss Grey A valet in charge? (*She pauses*) But what became of him?

Mrs Grose Mr Quint went too.

Miss Grey Went where?

Mrs Grose God knows where. He died.

Miss Grey Died? But how?

Mrs Grose He was found, miss, one winter's morning. Found by a farmhand going to work.

Miss Grey Found?

Mrs Grose Stone dead, miss, on the road to the village. He'd been at the public house the night before, drinking more than was good for him.

Miss Grey Drunk, you mean?

Mrs Grose So they say, miss. They found his body at the bottom of a steep icy slope. It seemed that in the dark he'd taken the wrong path altogether. There was a great deep wound to his head.

Miss Grey From the fall?

Mrs Grose So it seems.

Miss Grey What did they bring in—at the inquest?

Mrs Grose Well, the icy slope, the turn mistaken in the dark, the drink he'd taken . . .

Miss Grey Accident? They brought it in as an accident?

Mrs Grose That's what they called it.

Miss Grey But you think—?

Mrs Grose It's not my place to think, miss. But there was a lot of chatter in the village.

Miss Grey Why, what was there to chatter about?

Mrs Grose Because the man was naught but a villain—a devil. Because there were things about him that would have accounted for a deal more than a mere slip on the ice.

Miss Grey A villain? A devil? I don't understand.

Mrs Grose It's the truth, miss.

Miss Grey And yet he was placed in charge of these two innocent children? What on earth were you all dreaming of?

Mrs Grose It was the wish of the master.

Miss Grey But wait. Why are we talking about Quint? How could Quint be the man at the window if he's dead?

Mrs Grose No, miss, it was just the way you described him—the red hair and the birthmark. But of course, it's not possible. The man's cold in his grave.

Miss Grey Then who was it?

They stare at one another as the Lights fade to a Black-out

SCENE 3

The same. Morning, a few weeks later

Before the Lights come up Miles is heard playing the piano in the schoolroom. The Lights come up. Flora sits painting at an easel by the window

Mrs Grose comes quietly in from the little hall with a letter on a salver and stands listening to the music and watching Flora

Flora continues painting for a while and then speaks without turning

Flora Good-morning, Mrs Grose. What are you doing?

Mrs Grose Why, Miss Flora, you've got eyes in the back of your head. An enchanted child, that's what you are.

Flora Why were you just standing there?

Mrs Grose I was just saying to myself there never were two nicer children in this sad old world. Nor such clever ones. Just listen to Miles playing his little heart out. Is Miss Grey in there with him?

Flora Yes.

Mrs Grose Is she a good music teacher?

Flora Better ask Miles. I'm no judge.

Mrs Grose Well he certainly sounds better to me. (*Looking over Flora's shoulder*) And whoever saw such a beautiful painting by a girl so young?

Flora It's all right.

Mrs Grose All right? You've got every reflection in that lake and the trees look so real you expect to see a bird fly up. (*Suddenly she sees something*) Miss Flora?

Flora Yes?

Mrs Grose That man—what's he doing there?

Flora Which man?

Mrs Grose There—why, that man you've painted—hiding between the trees on the edge of the lake.

Flora A man? That's just the old pine tree that was split by lightning last month.

Mrs Grose Which pine tree?

Flora Just look out of the window and you'll see it.

Mrs Grose (*looking out*) Why, Lord bless, so it is. Nothing but an old tree.

Flora Is that a letter for Miss Grey?

Mrs Grose Yes, dear.

Flora From home?

Mrs Grose Now then, Miss Flora, it's not ladylike to ask where people's letters come from. We have to respect their privacy.

Flora They make her sad, don't they?

Mrs Grose What makes you say that?

Flora She's never happy when the post's been.

Mrs Grose Well, is she keeping you happy, that's what counts?

Flora Oh, yes, I'm all right. Miles gets a bit fed up, though. He wants to go back to school.

Mrs Grose Does he, indeed? Well, we'll have to wait and see.

The schoolroom door opens and Miss Grey comes out and talks to Miles inside

Miss Grey Just take it a little more slowly and try to get plenty of feeling into it. (*She sees Mrs Grose*) Oh, Mrs Grose, is that for me?

Mrs Grose Yes, miss.

Miss Grey's face falls. She glances at the letter and puts it in her pocket, then looks over Flora's shoulder

Miss Grey Flora, that's exceptionally good.

Mrs Grose And it isn't a man, miss, if that's what you were thinking.

Miss Grey A man?

Mrs Grose In the picture. It's just an old tree stump.

Miss Grey studies the picture more closely, then looks out of the window

Miss Grey Yes, of course it's a tree. It was struck by lightning a few weeks ago. Now, Flora, I think it's time you went in to your brother and did some singing practice.

Flora Oh, Miss Grey, please.

Mrs Grose Run along, my cherub. Miss Grey wants to read her letter—and I'll be going, too, miss.

Miss Grey No, stay, Mrs Grose. I've something to say to you. Well, Flora, off you go.

Flora goes into the schoolroom, leaving the door ajar

Miss Grey starts to say something, but can't

Mrs Grose Is there anything amiss?

Miss Grey I'm not sure. It's all so very curious. I mean that you should see a man, where no man existed.

Mrs Grose What? Oh, the picture. But it wasn't a man at all, miss—just a tree.

Miss Grey Yes, it's just a tree. The strange thing is that down by the lake this afternoon, when the children and I were having our picnic——

Mrs Grose Yes, miss?

Miss Grey I was nearly sure—no, I was certain—there was a man hiding among the trees.

Mrs Grose What?

Miss Grey Yes, a man. Watching us.

Mrs Grose You don't mean—? Not him?

Miss Grey Yes. And I'm almost certain he was looking for someone.

Mrs Grose You mean Quint?

Miss Grey The man I saw before. On the tower. At the window.

Mrs Grose And he was looking? Looking for you?

Miss Grey No, he was looking for Miles.

Mrs Grose Miles? How do you know?

Miss Grey I just know, I know, I know. And so do you know, Mrs Grose.

Mrs Grose goes and closes the schoolroom door before returning to Miss Grey. The piano music stops shortly

Mrs Grose But, miss—what if the boy should see him?

Miss Grey That's exactly what he wants.

Mrs Grose Master Miles—wants to see Quint?

Hungry for More?

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