On Chesil Beach

by

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EXT. THE BEACH. DAY

July 1962. Chesil Beach in summer calm and late afternoon glory. We are looking along a seventeen-mile-long, narrow finger of shingle, running between the English Channel and a salt lagoon known as the Fleet.

Shimmering in the far distance, at the limits of optical resolution, two figures, EDWARD MAYHEW and FLORENCE PONTING, approach us.

CREDITS

Now we see that they are holding hands.... that they are man and woman. Their voices and laughter are close, as is the tramping of their feet on the shingle.

    EDWARD (V.O.)
    So, we’re in E

    FLORENCE (V.O.)
    The tonic.

    EDWARD (V.O.)
    No, E.

    FLORENCE (V.O.)
    All right.

    EDWARD (V.O.)
    So, er, four bars of that, you know the sort of thing, Woke up this morning, head felt so bad, then, um, a nice seventh, then into A...

    FLORENCE (V.O.)
    The sub-dominant...

    EDWARD (V.O.)
    Never mind that.

    FLORENCE (V.O.)
    And what does he say now?

    EDWARD (V.O.)
    He says, Woke up this morning, head felt so bad. Same thing, different chord, see.
FLORENCE
Hmm. Tricky.

EDWARD
Then back to E again...

FLORENCE
Woke up this morning, head felt so bad...

A reverse. The couple walking away from us along the beach, towards their hotel, half-hidden among the trees in the wooded hills above the shore.

CREDITS cont’d.

EDWARD
Then, this is the uh emotional punch, reaches right up to B.

FLORENCE
The dominant.

EDWARD
No, B, and he says something like um, Gonna tell that two-timin’ woman, back through A, you know, something like er, She’s driving me mad, then into your E again perhaps for your title line, and then this lovely little thing, the turnaround on B seventh, and that brings you back to E.

FLORENCE
And am I?

EDWARD
What?

FLORENCE
Driving you mad.

EDWARD
Well, actually, yes, on every chord...
An air of rectitude and relaxation. Seven or eight couples, middle-aged or elderly. Gin and tonics, pipes, sheries, knitting, backgammon. The men mostly ex-military.

We see EDWARD and FLORENCE pass in front of the doors that give onto the corridor. They are by far the youngest guests in the hotel.

Two WAITERS, nervous, put-upon local lads, manipulate the trolley with its dish-warming candles along an ancient creaking corridor, lifting their burden painstakingly down a step.

WAITER ONE
Easy... Steady... Get it!

Close-up. The wine bottle, already opened, totters, falls, hits the floral carpet, starts to disgorge.

Bastard!

WAITER TWO
Give him here.

WAITER TWO, lips pursed in concentration, tips water from a glass jug into the wine bottle.

Sitting room and bedroom are connected by double doors. The sitting room has open french windows onto a small first floor balcony that overlooks the beach. A small bare dining table stands in front of the french windows.

A big pre-War bakelite wireless.

WIRELESS
‘...shows affinity with the melodic complexity of his later...’

EDWARD
Not tonight...
EDWARD, a strong, good-looking young man of twenty two, leans over the set, irritably fine-tuning.

FLORENCE is unpacking in the adjoining room. The connecting doors are wide open.

Fade in the opening licks of Chuck Berry’s ‘Roll over Beethoven’.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Perfect. Now listen!

Almost instantly, the song is overwhelmed by Morse code, German voices, then Moroccan orchestral music.

He gives the set a thump.

FLORENCE (V.O.)
Nice microtones...

EDWARD
A load of sick bloody cats... I’d rather have your lot...

He turns the dial back to the cultural programme, to the sound of applause. He looks over his shoulder at her with a wry smile, his irritation dissolving at the sight of her.

LAST OPENING CREDIT as the applause fades.

EDWARD’S lovestruck pov (through the open doors into the bedroom) of FLORENCE. We hear the rising cello in the opening of the Mozart quintet. She stands amid the business of unpacking, a beautiful young woman, a dress on a hangar in her hands, looking a little prim in her ‘going away’ clothes, and smiling nervously, anxious for his approval.

FLORENCE
I really don’t mind, if you want that Hank person... Or is it Elvis?

EDWARD
Chuck Berry. No, he’s gone, he’s had it...

FLORENCE
Honestly, you can, I think it’s, he’s quite...
He has come through the connecting doors into the bedroom. Between him and FLORENCE is a four-poster bed with a starchy white counterpane stretched smooth. They are intensely aware of the bed.

EDWARD
Quite what?

FLORENCE
Well, you know, merry...

EDWARD
Chuck Berry? What else?

FLORENCE
Well, you know... sort of... bouncy.

EDWARD
D’you know, I think you must be the squarest person in all of western civilisation.

He comes round the bed, takes her hand, draws her close, waiting to kiss her.

FLORENCE
But you love me.

EDWARD
Therefore I love you... you know, Florence, it was beautiful.

FLORENCE
Nothing went wrong!

EDWARD
Even my mother behaved herself.

FLORENCE
Do you think she knew what was happening?

EDWARD
Perhaps she did...
FLORENCE
Poor Edward...

They kiss tenderly.
Listen, I’ve decided. If we ever have a girl, she’ll be called Chloe.

EDWARD
Chloe. Yes, beautiful.

They kiss again. EDWARD becomes more pressing, and FLORENCE wants to please him. But there is a knock on the door.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Damn. Ignore it.

Another knock. She pulls away.

FLORENCE
You ought to look.

INT. HOTEL CORRIDOR. DAY

Outside EDWARD and FLORENCE’S room. The two young waiters exchange a meaningful look. They know what such silence means in the honeymoon suite. WAITER ONE is about to knock again when the door is wrenched open.

WAITER ONE
Evening sir. Dinner what you ordered.

EDWARD
Not this early...

INT. HOTEL SUITE, SITTING ROOM. DAY.

Ignoring him, the WAITERS, both nervous despite their satirical air, push the trolley in. Edward makes a helpless gesture in Florence’s direction.

WAITER TWO unfolds a tablecloth and flaps it over the dining table. An inshore breeze through the french windows disrupts his efforts. He tries again. And again. Unseen, EDWARD rolls his eyes at FLORENCE.
Something about the waiters, their nervousness and doggedness, gives FLORENCE the giggles. She turns away and we follow her into the bedroom.

INT. HOTEL SUITE. BEDROOM. DAY

She stands by the bed, trying to recover. From next door, EDWARD doing his best to sound authoritative.

    EDWARD (V.O.)
    You could push the window shut. Not all the way, no, more, that’s it. Thank you. Now try... Yes, yes... we both want the melon... and the thingy, the glazed cherry...

INT. HOTEL SUITE, SITTING ROOM. DAY.

Minutes later. EDWARD and FLORENCE are at table, the two WAITERS serve from the trolley. The floorboards squeak loudly against the silence.

EDWARD watches the WAITERS closely for any sign of mockery.

Plates of melon are set down. The wine is poured for EDWARD to taste. He takes his time, samples it and frowns importantly, holds his glass to the light, takes a second sip.

    EDWARD
    Very good actually.

    WAITER TWO
    Thank you sir.

He pours.

CUT TO A minute later. The WAITERS stand back, napkins over their forearms, staring straight ahead, expressions impenetrable. The COUPLE are acutely conscious of them and avoid each other’s eye.

    EDWARD
    Are you er, are you going to stand there the whole time?
WAITER ONE
We do the silver service on the beef, sir, and then we all retire.

EDWARD decides to be bold. He takes the glazed cherry off his melon and offers it to FLORENCE with an ironic flourish. She sucks it from his fingers, holds his gaze. There is something a little forced in her performance. The WAITERS pretend not to see.

EDWARD
Any more of those?

WAITER ONE
Ain’t none sir. Sorry sir.

CUT TO:

A minute later. The WAITERS are busy at the trolley. EDWARD leans forward, whispers.

EDWARD
I love you.

FLORENCE
And I...

But WAITER ONE is at her elbow with the beef and serves the sodden vegetables while WAITER TWO piles a sideboard with trifle, cheese, chocolates.

The WAITERS are ready to leave.

WAITER TWO
You ever get the need for something sir, pull on the string. Hard.

WAITER ONE
And have a very nice one sir.

EDWARD
Good night.

But the WAITERS linger.

WAITER TWO
That is, a very nice evening, sir.
EDWARD
Oh yes. Here. Thank you.

EDWARD hands over a ten shilling note. He holds FLORENCE’S gaze as they listen to the trolley retreat down the corridor. They hear what sounds like a hoot of laughter. We are close on EDWARD -

INT. MAYHEW’S COTTAGE. SITTING ROOM. DAY.

July 1961. The hooting sound persists, faintly, growing louder. EDWARD is sprawled on a tattered sofa in the chaotic sitting room reading. He registers the sound. His concentration is breaking. With a resigned sigh he goes to the window.

His POV through the leaded window down the untidy garden in full bloom. His mother, MARJORIE, is standing under a tree, completely naked, staring up into the branches, making her hooting sound.

EDWARD
Oh God...

EXT. MAYHEWS’ GARDEN. DAY.

EDWARD has put a blanket around MARJORIE’S shoulders and is escorting her back towards the cottage.

MARJORIE
She was up there, she could hear me. You know son, she could understand me. She was listening to me.

EDWARD
I know, I know. But she’d also listen to you with your clothes on.

MARJORIE
She needs the connection. Now the nights are shorter she doesn’t sleep so much.

EDWARD
But she won’t come down.
MARJORIE
She’ll never come down. We’re quite safe...

As they approach the cottage, EDWARD’S father, LIONEL comes out through the kitchen door, both concerned and resigned.

LIONEL
Marjorie Mayhew. You’ll get me thrown in prison.

Behind LIONEL come the twins Harriet and Anne, aged fifteen. They’ve seen it all before. The family gathers round Marjorie, shepherds her indoors.

HARRIET
Come on, Mum.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, SITTING ROOM. DAY.

The COUPLE are alone at last. Awkwardness descends. Without appetite, they push the food around their plates. The waves breaking on the beach sound loudly through the French windows, which stand ajar. They meet each other’s eye, smile nervously, look away.

CLOSE on FLORENCE. She is in unhappy anticipation of what she must go through after dinner. Her POV: EDWARD, his big, eager face, his uncertain expression.

Then EDWARD’S POV: Behind FLORENCE, through the connecting doors, he can see into the bedroom.

EDWARD
To... uh, Chloe.

FLORENCE
To Chloe.

EDWARD
D’you know, as you walk that way along the beach, the stones get bigger.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Yes?
EDWARD
Over thousands of years storms have sort of graded the pebbles. When local fishermen come ashore at night they can tell exactly where they are.

A pause.
That’s the story, anyway.

FLORENCE
We could go back out there.

EDWARD
You don’t mean now.

FLORENCE
Why not? Take the wine, some fruit. It won’t get dark for a long time.

But EDWARD is looking over her shoulder at the bed.

EDWARD
I’m not sure we could just leave all this er...

FLORENCE
I’m not awfully hungry after that lunch.

EDWARD
Yes, but Flo, they’ve gone to a lot of trouble. We can’t just...

FLORENCE
I know, but it looks so beautiful out there...

EDWARD
But... we’re here... in here... and you’re so beautiful. I keep thinking how beautiful you are and...

FLORENCE
I suppose you’re right, I mean, about going out.
EDWARD
Oh God. Look, sorry. Am I being a bully?

FLORENCE
Of course you’re not.

EDWARD
You know what, I could get them to bring back that plate warmer thingy. And we could go out for as long as we like.

He starts to get up.

FLORENCE
No, I’m just being silly...

He is going towards the bell.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Honestly, Edward, I don’t think I could bear to have them back in here.

EDWARD
It won’t take a minute. No trouble at all...

His hand is on the bell. Uncharacteristically, FLORENCE raises her voice.

FLORENCE
Edward, please, no!

He turns, just a little startled. Oh God, we’re having our first row.

EDWARD
Florence, we’re not...

FLORENCE
We are. Because I’m being selfish.

EDWARD
Honestly, we’re not... you’re not...
FLORENCE
We are, we are. And it’s all my stupid fault.

INT. PONTINGS HOUSE. DINING ROOM. DAY.

September 1961. A large Victorian villa in north Oxford. FLORENCE and her mother, VIOLET, and her 14 year old sister, RUTH are at table. GEOFFREY PONTING’S place is empty. The issue is FLORENCE’S CND badge. The emotional tone is tense.

VIOLET
... I would have thought it was the pretentious sort of thing you would have put behind you after college.

FLORENCE
Well, I like it and I believe in it and I intend to go on wearing it.

RUTH
Mummy, we talked about this yesterday...

VIOLET
And what are they saying, your Aldermaston lot, about this wonderful wall in Berlin last month. Bit awkward for the lefties, is it?

FLORENCE
We hate it. Everyone hates it.

VIOLET
An entire country turned into a prison camp, with the Soviet’s blessing. A proud day for socialism!

FLORENCE is trying not to rise to this.

FLORENCE
How was school?

RUTH
All right.
VIOLET
A million Russian troops spread along the borders. What do you think prevents them sending their tanks across the north German plain?

FLORENCE
Commonsense, I should think.

VIOLET
Commonsense, nonsense! It’s the Bomb, the one you want to ban. Nato hasn’t got the men and tanks to hold them back, and communism, as it proudly proclaims, is an expansionist creed. It’s our nuclear bombs that deter them. It’s as simple as that my dear. We have to have a deterrent.

FLORENCE
Well we don’t, actually. Do you remember a couple of months ago I said I met this chap at a CND meeting. I bumped into him again in town this morning. I’ve asked him round tomorrow. For tea.

VIOLET
Chap?

RUTH
Is he a beatnik?

FLORENCE
No.

GEOFFREY has appeared behind FLORENCE’S chair with a bottle of wine he is about to open. He rests a hand lightly on her shoulders. Almost imperceptibly, she tightens, flinches.

GEOFFREY
Beard and sandals?

FLORENCE
No, actually.

VIOLET
What does he do?
RUTH
He’s a beatnik.

FLORENCE
Shut up. He’s like me, just finished his degree.

VIOLET
What college?

FLORENCE
UCL.

VIOLET
But that’s London. For sons of tradesmen. Florence!

GEOFFREY
They produce some pretty decent engineers.

VIOLET
Exactly.

GEOFFREY
What does his father do?

FLORENCE
You mean, is he working class or one of us.

GEOFFREY
Yes. I think that’s more or less what I mean.

FLORENCE
His dad is headmaster of a primary school in Henley.

GEOFFREY
Hmm...

VIOLET
And what does he intend doing with himself?

RUTH
He wants to be a beatnik.
FLORENCE
I haven’t researched his prospects. I haven’t worked out his precise socio-economic status. I haven’t arranged to marry him. I’ve asked him for tea. For tea!

A pause after this outburst.

GEOFFREY
Jolly good. Pass me those new er, what are we calling them?

VIOLET
Mange tout.

EDWARD and FLORENCE have abandoned their dinner, but are still at the table. The tone now is intimate.

FLORENCE
How old?

EDWARD
I was fifteen. He took me to the bottom of the garden so the girls wouldn’t hear. And so he told me what happened in 1944. I’d grown up with it and took it for granted. We all did. You’ve seen how it is. We didn’t even let ourselves think she had a condition. And when I heard it, this horrible phrase, everything fell into place, and everything was different. Brain-damaged. Suddenly I saw her the way other people did... Anyway, let’s...

FLORENCE
Terrible moment...

EDWARD
No, it was like... a release. I felt this space opening out. She was brain-damaged, and I wasn’t.

(MORE)
EDWARD (CONT’D)
I was not my mother, I wasn’t my family, I was me... a secret me. I knew one day I’d leave, and come back as a visitor... sort of a lonely feeling, but I felt for the first time that I really existed - in myself, not as part of something and I felt... impatient, excited. Does that make me sound a brute?

FLORENCE
You’re always so kind to her. My parents just pretend to be brain damaged, and I’m just awful to them.

EDWARD
I don’t know why my dad didn’t tell us all long ago. I mean, Flo...

FLORENCE
He didn’t want you and the twins to think she was strange or different. He wants everything to seem normal and...

EDWARD
I know... Florence, look...

He stands, comes round to her side of the table.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
I love you, you’re so... I mean, I need to kiss you.

She stands, they are close, they begin to kiss.

FLORENCE
I love you too... And I... I...

EDWARD
What is it darling?

FLORENCE
Nothing. I love you. That’s all it is.
EXT. GARDEN OF MAYHEWS’ COTTAGE. DAY.

July 1961. A hot day. Sound of insects. EDWARD is slumped under the tree at the bottom of the garden, reading in the shade. He hears his name being called from the front of the cottage.

POSTMAN (V.O.)
Ed! Second post. Looks like the one!

EDWARD runs the length of the garden.

EXT. FRONT GARDEN OF MAYHEWS’ COTTAGE. DAY.

The POSTMAN hands over a brown envelope.

POSTMAN
Big moment, eh?

EDWARD is about to open the letter, hesitates.

POSTMAN
Tell me tomorrow, Ed. And good luck.

EDWARD pauses with the envelope in his hands. Wishes. Then opens it. A look of shock.

EDWARD
I don’t believe it...

Dazed, shaking his head, he walks towards the house.

INT. SITTING ROOM, MAYHEWS’ COTTAGE. DAY.

The squalor is overwhelming. Pots of old glue, food scraps, discarded paper, a broken chair, a curtain hanging askew from a damaged rail.
MARGORIE is cutting pictures from a magazine to paste into a scrap book. She looks up sharply as EDWARD comes in.

EDWARD
Mum, listen. Are you listening?

MARJORIE
This isn’t how she looks now. It’s the future. It’s a new thing. A special camera tells you how she’ll look one day.

EDWARD
This is important. Put that down a minute. Listen to me. I got a first. Mum, a first...

MARJORIE
That’s right, son. I saw you. I was watching. Now you tell me. Yellow, like this. It’s got two things, a number and a meaning. Now I know the number...

EDWARD
Seven.

MARJORIE
Seven. But I can’t remember what it means.

INT. MAYHEWS’ COTTAGE. STAIRS. DAY

EDWARD goes up the stairs.

EDWARD
Ruth? Harriet?

INT. MAYHEW’S COTTAGE. GIRLS’ BEDROOM. DAY.

More squalor – unmade beds, discarded dirty clothes on the floor, food-encrusted plates etc. Teenage boredom. The girls are on their beds. HARRIET paints her fingernails, RUTH is writing in a diary. A tiny transistor plays squawky pop music.
EDWARD
I got a first!

RUTH
Is that good?

EDWARD
It’s the best.

HARRIET
Dad’ll be happy then.

EDWARD
When’s he back?

HARRIET
Eight.

RUTH
Nine.

HARRIET
Nine.

EDWARD
You know, you should be outside. It’s beautiful.

RUTH
Too hot.

HARRIET
Too boring.

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EXT. AVENUE OF LIMES. RURAL PHONE BOX. DAY

In LONGSHOT, the phone box looks dwarfed by the avenue of great limes on Turville Heath.

EDWARD (V.O.)
Is Toby there?... oh, when are you expecting him?..

CUT TO:

Mrs Davenport? Edward Mayhew, university friend of Henry. Is he there?.. Finland?
EXT. EDWARD’S BEDROOM, MAYHEWS’ COTTAGE. DAY.

EDWARD rummages through a drawer, finds some loose change. Yanks open another, finds a book, opens it, pulls out two ten shilling notes.

INT. MAYHEWS’ GARDEN SHED. DAY.

With fierce impatience, EDWARD pulls out his old bike from under a pile of junk.

EXT. MAYHEWS’ BACK GARDEN. DAY.

EDWARD pumps up a tire.

CUT TO:

Wipes the dust off the bike with a rag.

CUT TO:

He wheels the bike, tests the brakes – useless. Glances down, sees broken brake shoes dangling above the spokes.

EXT. STEEP HILL IN THE CHILTERNs. DAY.

At reckless speed EDWARD flies down a hill.

He uses his feet against the front wheel as a brake.

EXT. COUNTY ROAD. DAY.

Hurriedly, EDWARD hides his bike behind a hedge. A rural bus marked ‘Oxford’ is approaching.

EXT. STREETS, OXFORD. DAY.

Edward enters a pub.

CUT TO:
And comes out.

CUT TO:

And enters another.

EXT. NARROW COBBLED STREET, OXFORD. DAY.


Only a little unsteadily, he goes down a narrow passage way, enters a church hall with high pitched roof and beams, and dusty light filtered through high windows.

Echoing voices, various people standing about, waiting for the meeting to begin.

Then he sees her. FLORENCE is standing in a pool of light, listening to a tall thin young man who is holding in two hands a pile of pamphlets.

EDWARD stops, struck by her beauty.

FLORENCE looks his way, while TIMOTHY, holding the pamphlets, talks on. She notices his toes breaking through his raggedy plimsoles.

EDWARD’S and FLORENCE’S eyes meet.

Her POV past TIMOTHY’S shoulder: the well-built young stranger intrigues her.

FLORENCE watches with interest as Edward approaches.

TIMOTHY
...just consider it for a moment, Florence. If it fell on St Giles the crater would be half a mile across, a hundred feet deep, and the city would be uninhabitable for a thousand years because you see the radioactivity...

FLORENCE
(takes a pamphlet from TIMOTHY’S pile)
Hello. Would you like one?
(MORE)
It’s all about a hydrogen bomb landing on Oxford.

EDWARD
I can’t think of anything I’d rather read.

CLOSE IN. As he takes the pamphlet from her, their hands touch.

FLORENCE and EDWARD hold each other’s gaze. TIMOTHY scowls.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Do you mind if I tell you something?

FLORENCE
No.

TIMOTHY
I say, do we know you?

EDWARD
I just got a first. In history.

FLORENCE
(softly)
Fantastic...

EXT. PORT MEADOW. OXFORD. DAY.

Half an hour later. EDWARD pushes his bike, FLORENCE walks beside him.

EDWARD
This is my idea. A series of history books not about the great men, but about the minor figures at their side, the bit part players who fade away. Like the man who rode non-stop from London to Edinburgh to tell the king of Scotland that Elizabeth was dead and that he was now the king of England..

FLORENCE
I think that’s brilliant.

A little later, across the meadow.
FLORENCE (CONT’D)
I thought everything would be clear as soon as my result came through. But it isn’t. I’m still just hanging around.

EDWARD
Like me.

FLORENCE
I could play in this awful dance orchestra in a hotel near Slough. But what I really want is to work with my quartet.

EDWARD
What’s that?

She looks at him, intrigued and amused by his ignorance.

FLORENCE
Two violins, viola, cello. We’re called the Ennismore Quartet. Then Daddy would have to support me and he and I don’t exactly...

EDWARD
What did you get?

FLORENCE
What?

EDWARD
In your music degree.

FLORENCE
Well, actually, same as you.

EDWARD lets his bike fall to the grass as he snatches up a dandelion and solemnly and sincerely presents it to her.

EDWARD
Miss Florence ah...

FLORENCE
Ponting.
EDWARD
To Miss Florence Ponting. This is for you. A great achievement. Well done.

She receives the dandelion, stares at him, suddenly touched. No one in her family has made much of her degree.

FLORENCE
(quietly)
Thank you.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, SITTING ROOM. DAY.

The kisses continue. EDWARD’S eyes are closed, he is in a kind of swoon.

FLORENCE’S eyes are open, she’s determined to please him, to be plausible somehow, but it is not easy for her. His tongue is in her mouth. She accepts this, but she doesn’t like it. She feels acutely self-conscious. She pulls away a little, whispers -

FLORENCE
Edward...

EDWARD
What..?

FLORENCE
Sorry...

EDWARD
What is it darling?

FLORENCE
I just thought, well, you know, that it isn’t awfully comfortable here when we could...

She looks hopefully towards the french windows, and beyond, a glimpse of beach and sea.

EDWARD begins to understand, or thinks he does.

EDWARD
You mean... yes, of course, let’s... come on then...
He takes her hand and tows her towards the bedroom, towards the smooth wide bed.

FLORENCE lets herself be led, as though to a slaughter. She sees the bed over his shoulder.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM. DAY.

CLOSE on EDWARD as they arrive in the bedroom. He knows what he wants, but he not quite sure what he should be doing next.

They are right by the bed. Uncertainly, he turns to face her, goes close, puts a hand on her shoulder, on the front of her dress, looking for some button or fastener which might give him a clue to undressing her. There’s nothing.

EDWARD
If I just took this... I mean... we could go on the bed and, well...

FLORENCE
Then, I think I’ll... my shoes...

EDWARD
Right. Of course.

He goes to bend towards them

FLORENCE
No, I can do it. It’s better.

She turns away from him and goes towards the bedroom window. Still facing away from EDWARD, she sits on a chair. Her shaking hands fumble with one shoe then the other.

She stands in her silk stockings, and as she turns to face him she hears a voice:

CHARLES (V.O.)
People think you’re shy, but the fact is you’re rather tough aren’t you.
May 1960. FLORENCE is rehearsing with her quartet - JENNY (2ND VIOLIN), SONIA (viola) and CHARLES, (cello) - all second-year students at the Royal College of Music.

Sitting listening are a couple of friends, a tutor and a girl, another student, ELSBETH.

We come in on the last passionate and tumultuous four bars of the 3rd Razumovsky quartet. Then, an expectant silence. Have they just done something amazing? They are waiting for FLORENCE. She is matter-of-fact.

FLORENCE
It’ll do for now.

She leans forward to make a pencil note on her score. Then draws from under it another score, from which she takes the various parts and hands them out. There is a murmur of disapproval from the other players.

CHARLES
What’s this?

There is one part left over. Unseen by the others, ELSBETH stands with her viola already out of its case, and takes the part, goes to fetch a music stand.

JENNY
Quintet?

FLORENCE
You said I should decide on the next piece...

SONIA
But it means getting in another viola.

CHARLES
Another person. It’s going to change everything.

JENNY
It’s too soon.
FLORENCE
Say hello to Elsbeth, in her third year, awfully good.

ELSBETH
Hello.

The players are embarrassed. They mutter their greetings, reluctantly make space for her.

FLORENCE
Right then, we’ll begin. Charles, your big moment.

CHARLES examining his part is beginning to come round.

CHARLES
So I see.

FLORENCE
We’ll take it a little slower than marked.

CHARLES plays the opening of Mozart’s D major Quintet.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Again. It’s... tender. Like a question.

CHARLES plays it again – the cello’s rising question, the gentle response of the violins and violas. It’s clear within seconds that the piece has the players in its spell. We are CLOSE on FLORENCE’S quiet satisfaction.

CUT TO:

The rehearsal is breaking up. FLORENCE is in a tearing hurry. She struggles into her raincoat, snatches up her violin case and a small bag, hurries down a run of concrete stairs that lead to the street. Her hand is on the door when she turns at the sound of a voice behind her. CHARLES is at the top the stairs.

CHARLES
People think you’re shy, but the fact is you’re rather tough aren’t you.

FLORENCE smiles apologetically, half turns.
CHARLES (CONT’D)
Can I buy you that drink?

FLORENCE
I’m late for work.

She pushes on the door and steps into –

33
EXT. LONDON STREET. NIGHT.
A rainstorm. FLORENCE runs down the street.

34
EXT. SECOND LONDON STREET. NIGHT.
And hurries down another street, violin case stuffed under her coat for protection.

35
EXT. STREET BY WIGMORE HALL. NIGHT.
Walking hurriedly now, she comes down the street and turns into the stage door of Wigmore Hall.

36
INT. WIGMORE HALL. LADIES LAVATORY. NIGHT.
By a row of hand basins, FLORENCE vigorously dries her hair with a borrowed towel.

37
INT. WIGMORE HALL. STAGE. AUDITORIUM. NIGHT.
A concert is in progress. Two grand pianos fill the stage. Two PIANISTS are playing Rachmaninov’s ‘Symphonic Dances’. FLORENCE is at one piano, primly seated at the pianist’s side. She’s a page turner.

The haunting second theme of the first movement is floating in.

We see a row of the audience – very elderly, rapt, gnarled faces.

We CLOSE IN on FLORENCE. The music is affecting her. Some powerful emotion is being held in check.

As she leans forward to turn a page, CUT TO.
EXT. BOAT ON ENGLISH CHANNEL. DAY.

Summer 1952. Music continues. An idyll. A small yacht cutting through a calm blue sea. GEOFFREY PONTING is at the rudder. Twelve year old FLORENCE holds a jib sheet.

The boat enters a small harbour.

INT. BOAT. NIGHT.

In her nightdress, FLORENCE is in her bunk in the small cabin below the deck. At the far end of the cabin are steep steps up to the deck.

A wireless on a shelf above her bed plays through static the same haunting melody.

At a sound, she looks up sharply. A shadow falls across the steps, and moves forwards as GEOFFREY descends.

INT. WIGMORE HALL. STAGE. NIGHT.

The music. FLORENCE is struggling to control herself. She bites her lip, she’s trembling. But she is not going to let go. She leans to turn another page.

INT. WIGMORE HALL. GREEN ROOM. NIGHT.

The post concert reception. The two PIANISTS, FRIENDS, ADMIRERS, Wigmore ADMINISTRATORS. FLORENCE is taking round a tray of drinks.

CUT TO:

An hour later. The room has emptied. FLORENCE and another GIRL are clearing up.

INT. WIGMORE HALL. AUDITORIUM. NIGHT.

Fifteen minutes later. FLORENCE goes through the door that connects the green room with the auditorium. It is still lit, but completely empty.
She sits at a piano, sounds a note, listens to it fade. And begins to weep quietly.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM. DAY.

FLORENCE without her shoes watching EDWARD as he approaches from the bed.

He draws her to him again. Their faces are close.

FLORENCE
Do you want to know a secret?

EDWARD
Yes.

FLORENCE
Actually, I’m a little bit scared.

A pause. They hold each other’s gaze.

EDWARD
I think I am too.

He puts his hand over her shoulder to reach for the zip of her dress. The other hand is in the small of her back, pressing her body against his.

He whispers close into her ear.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
I love you... I love you...

We are on his hand as it fumbles with the zip. His fingers are large and clumsy. Then the zip is free but hard to draw down with one hand. The light cotton material is trapped.

EDWARD tries to peer over FLORENCE’S shoulder. He gives a sharp tug. Now the zip is firmly snagged in the cloth.

FLORENCE’S hand flutters ineffectually over her shoulder. Anxious to protect his pride, she does not know whether to help him or not.

FLORENCE
I could...
EDWARD
Oh for God’s sake, Flo, just keep still will you. Turn round.

Shocked, obedient, she turns.

Now even two hands are not enough. The zip will not go down or up. EDWARD’S arms tremble with the effort.

FLORENCE
Please don’t tear it...

EDWARD reels away in frustration.

EDWARD
Oh bloody hell! I’m a clumsy idiot. I can’t do the simplest thing. A zip! There’s something wrong with me...

He catches her startled, guilty expression.
I’m sorry, I’m really sorry. It’s such a bloody mess!

FLORENCE
It happens to me sometimes. I have to get my sister to...

EDWARD
But I’m so damn stupid!

FLORENCE
Look, let’s sit on the bed...

Grateful to be taking an initiative, she guides him towards the bed. They sit.

Pause.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
You get so cross sometimes.

EDWARD
I know, I know.

FLORENCE
You look like you want to hit someone.
EDWARD

Do I?

FLORENCE

Your face goes... quite frightening.
You used to get in fights, didn’t you.
You told me...

EDWARD

Not anymore. Not for ages...

They are half sitting, half reclining on the bed. They face the open bedroom windows and a view of the beach. The sound of waves on the shore. FLORENCE is grateful for the temporary reprieve from seduction.

FLORENCE

Tell me something.

EDWARD

You’ve got beautiful legs and...

FLORENCE

No, not that. Not about me.

EDWARD

‘With my body I thee worship’

FLORENCE

Tell me about the last time you got in a fight.

EDWARD

Oh, it was terrible. You don’t want to hear about that...

FLORENCE

I do. I need to know your worst side.

EDWARD

Well, it was in my final year. Saturday night. I went to the Hundred Club...

FLORENCE

Where?
EDWARD
Just a club... to hear John Mayall and the Blues...

FLORENCE
Is he famous?

EDWARD
Very. But I only heard the support band. I went with his chap, cleverest person in our year, fantastically intellectual, you know, thick glasses, rather short, knew everything, knew everyone. Harold Mather. I don't know what he was doing there. He hated loud music...

FLORENCE
Like me.

EDWARD
Even more than you. I think he was just curious. Anyway, I really admired Harold. I wanted him to take me seriously. I wanted him to publish my stuff in his magazine...

INT. BLUES CLUB. NIGHT.

April 1960. The support band on stage coming to the climax of their set with the final bars of a blues standard (Sweet Home Chicago etc).

In the crowd we find EDWARD engrossed in the music. At his side is HAROLD, not enjoying himself one bit, wincing at the guitar’s high notes, glancing around.

CUT TO:

Ten minutes later. Between sets. EDWARD, HAROLD and some other university friends, TED, BOB, JACK, are at the bar.

TED
She wasn’t having it. And everyone told me she was putting out...

There are knowing guffaws. HAROLD is only faintly amused.
JACK
Not to you, mate...

BOB
And you’re wrong. Lucy’s tits are bigger, Susie’s tits are bigger...

TED
Lucy’s tits aren’t big...

A chorus groan of dissent.

EDWARD
You’re in dreamland, the lot of you. If you want to go all the way with a girl in the History department...

TED
Or the English department...

EDWARD
First you’ve got to meet her parents...

BOB
And then you’ve got to marry her...

More laughter. HAROLD taps EDWARD’S arm.

HAROLD
I think I’ll head off. Late night meeting of the Philosophy Society.

EDWARD
(unconvincingly)
Philosophy! That’s great. I’ll come with you.

45 EXT. SOHO STREET. NIGHT.

Fairly deserted, cobbled.

HAROLD
He actually invented the term existentialism. And the point about Gabriel Marcel is this - have you read Existence and Objectivity by the way?
EDWARD
Er, no, not yet.

HAROLD
I’ll lend you a copy. The point is harmony. As individuals we’re all seeking harmony in our transient lives and we find it through what he called secondary reflection...

As HAROLD is speaking, a COUPLE is approaching. EDWARD, only half listening is aware of them. They look like a wealthy young pair. The MAN is big, wears a camel coat and swaggers with his cane. The WOMAN clings to his arm. They are both a little drunk.

HAROLD (O.C.) (CONT’D)
...the key idea being that philosophical enquiry was based on ‘wonder and astonishment’, and being open to the presence of others...

As the MAN passes, he delivers with the advantage of height a hard, flat-handed smack to the back of HAROLD’S head.

MAN
Jewboy!

HAROLD is sent reeling, his glasses go skittering across the cobbles.

The MAN strolls on, the WOMAN is giggling.

EDWARD hesitates, then strides after the MAN.

HAROLD
Edward, don’t. It’s all right, I’m fine...

But EDWARD is in a dream. Nothing will stop him. He grabs the MAN’S shoulder, spins him round and slams him against wall. The MAN’S head clunks against a drainpipe.

The WOMAN is screaming and scrabbling uselessly at EDWARD’S arm. Holding the MAN by the throat with his left hand, EDWARD hits him in the face, once, very hard.

The MAN sinks to the ground. The GIRL is distraught.
WOMAN
Police! Someone call the police!

EDWARD retrieves from the gutter HAROLD’S cracked glasses and hands them to him.

They walk on in silence.

They leave behind the MAN sitting on the kerb, head in hands, while the WOMAN fusses over him.

46

EXT. SECOND SOHO STREET. NIGHT.

The silence lasts. EDWARD glances anxiously at his friend. Harold’s face is grim.

EDWARD
These are terrible people...

Silence.
We have to stand up to them...

Silence.

They arrive at a door.

HAROLD
Look, Edward. You go on in. I’ve remembered something I ought to be doing. An essay I should look over. And so I, well, that’s it. I’m going.

EDWARD
But Harold. This is your meeting. Harold.

We watch HAROLD’S retreating back.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Harold!

47

INT. HOTEL SUITE. BEDROOM. DAY.

EDWARD and FLORENCE on the bed.
EDWARD
He avoided me after that, never spoke
to me again.

FLORENCE is now lying back on the bed, gazing thoughtfully
towards the ceiling. She speaks as though from far away.

FLORENCE
My dad’s says things about Jews. When
Mummy’s not around, that is. Drives me
nuts.

She pauses.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Why do you think he never spoke to you
again?

EDWARD
I think he was ashamed of me. I’d
always been in fights. In play
grounds. Then outside pubs at chucking-
out time.

FLORENCE
Edward! So dangerous and stupid. Why?

EDWARD
People said I was good at it. I used
to be proud of myself.

FLORENCE
And then?

EDWARD
I saw myself through Harold’s eyes. A
yokel in a punch-up. Not an
intellectual. Not cool. He made me
ashamed of myself. I wanted to be
cool.

She kisses him.

FLORENCE
You are. And now you’ve got to promise
your wife. No more fights. Ever.
EDWARD
Promise.

FLORENCE
Not even if... if someone says something bad to me.

EDWARD evades. He is gazing at her legs stretched out on the white counterpane.

EDWARD
Uhuh. Can I ask you something?

FLORENCE
Of course.

EDWARD
I want to take your stockings off.

FLORENCE
I think I’d better do it.

Self-consciously, she unclips the top of her stockings. EDWARD watches transfixed. His pov - the lifted hem of the light summer dress, the glimpse of her suspender belt, the silk stocking peeling away to reveal her sun-tanned legs.

Utterly entranced, EDWARD has to clear his throat to speak.

EDWARD
So brown...

FLORENCE
All that tennis in Summertown.

He moves closer to her side. The bedsprings squeak mournfully. This sound will become a feature. He places a hand well above her knee, and lets it move up. FLORENCE stiffens involuntarily.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Sorry... Sort of tickles.

EDWARD
It’s all right.

He moves his hand further under her dress, along her inner thigh. FLORENCE’S face tightens.
But she’s determined not to let him down. This is the expression she had at the Rachmaninov concert. She will get through this.

The couple speak in just above a whisper –

FLORENCE
I want to ask you something.

EDWARD
Yes.

FLORENCE
I asked you before but you didn’t quite... you said ‘a lot’, but I mean, how many girls have you, you know...

Under the dress. The long thumb gently palpates. Their voices are dreamy, breathy.

EDWARD
The truth is, Well, not many really.

FLORENCE
How many then?

EDWARD
Just... some.

EDWARD’S gentle movements are beginning to have an effect on FLORENCE. A sensation of unfamiliar intensity is spreading through her.

FLORENCE
Six?

This is an awkward subject for EDWARD, but he does not want to break the moment.

EDWARD
Yes, about that, or... I don’t know...

FLORENCE
Four..? Do you think it was four?

EDWARD
I... uh... Flo... perhaps it’s...sort of... uh... a matter of definition.
EDWARD’S hand has moved closer, his fingers have pushed past the trim of her knickers.

FLORENCE
And Edward... I feel... I’m feeling...
But... who were they?

EDWARD
Who?

Without pulling his hand away, he has positioned his face over hers. He lowers his head to graze her lips.
Uh... students.

FLORENCE
And... what were their names..?

EDWARD
Oh, Flo, why are we talking about...
there are no names... you’re the first. You are the first.

FLORENCE
You’re not to make fun of me...

INT. PONTINGS HOUSE. FLORENCE’S BEDROOM. DAY.

May 1962. FLORENCE alone in a private moment of intense self-communion. In front of a full length mirror she is trying on the underwear that she will wear on her wedding night. Empty boxes, wrapping tissue as well as sheet music on the floor at her feet.

She stands full on to the mirror, turns, turns the other way, regards herself over her shoulder. Trying to see herself in new terms, as he will see her. Is she beautiful? Will EDWARD think she is. She is, of course, but she doesn’t know she is, she doesn’t feel it.

FLORENCE turns again. Her hand plays across the pastel silk, cups her breast. She is unconvinced.

She frowns.
INT. PONTINGS’ HOUSE, BEDROOM. NORTH OXFORD. DAY.

FLORENCE is at a window seat with a book, ‘Love, Sex and Marriage - a Young Bride’s Guide.’ Behind her, a violin in its open case, music stand, sheet music. At various points she looks up, faintly nauseated, then forces herself to go on reading.

FLORENCE (V.O.)
‘...this pleasurable excitement causes the penis to fill with blood and become engorged...’ oh God...
‘secretes a clear substance to lubricate the mucous membrane...’
ugh... ‘and now the foreplay is concluded, he lies on top of her, and it is perfectly acceptable for her to use a hand gently to guide her husband in, and at last he enters her...’
enters me... ‘he enters her and this is known as penetration...’

RUTH, is in the hall, looking for her.

RUTH (V.O.)
Flo?

FLORENCE
Enter. You may enter me.

RUTH
What?

FLORENCE
Nothing.

RUTH
Are you all right?

FLORENCE
I’m feeling rather sick.

RUTH
What are you reading?

FLORENCE
A sex manual.

In thrilled horror, RUTH’S hand covers her mouth.
RUTH
Flo! Because of Edward! What does it say?

FLORENCE
It says women are like doorways. Men have to enter through them.

RUTH
That’s so ridiculous! That simply isn’t true.

FLORENCE
I’m afraid it is...

RUTH
What else does it say?

FLORENCE
You won’t like this. It says the penis...

RUTH shrieks at the word.
... the penis fills with...

Suddenly their mother, VIOLET, is in the doorway. She’s an academic, a brittle, angular woman, rather cold. She speaks sharply.

VIOLET
No sign of Daddy?

RUTH
No.

VIOLET
Well that’s typical. I’m giving my Spinoza supervision now so Ruth, no running across the hall, and Florence, no screeching until I’m done. Is that clear?

She vanishes as quickly as she appeared. The girls exchange a look.

RUTH
Do you think Mummy was ever a doorway?
The VICAR, the REV. WOOLLETT, is portly, benign, an old friend of the family. A cat snoozes on his lap. REV. WOOLLETT will marry FLORENCE and EDWARD in New College Chapel, Oxford. We are in a small book-lined parlour where two armchairs face a fireplace. FLORENCE cradles a mug of tea.

We come in on a silence. REV. WOOLLETT has asked a question.

REV. WOOLLETT
All right. Let me put this another way. You don’t seem quite as happy as you should — in love, as you say, getting married in the summer.

FLORENCE laughs nervously.

FLORENCE
No, I am honestly, I’m very happy...

REV. WOOLLETT
Something’s bothering you, Flo.

FLORENCE
It could be the quartet, the cellist, Charles. I think he’s a bit taken with me, keeps asking me out.

REV. WOOLLETT
That’s easy. Now you’ve got a fiance.

FLORENCE
Oh well, you see, I don’t want the quartet to know. They’ll think I’m leaving, they’ll panic. I have to wait for the right moment. You know, reassure them...

She laughs nervously again and subsides. Another pause.

REV. WOOLLETT
That’s not it though, is it?

She waits, then minimally shakes her head.

REV. WOOLLETT (CONT’D)
Something about yourself...
FLORENCE’S gaze is fixed on the carpet.

REV. WOOLLETT (CONT’D)
...a little delicate... Not something you could discuss with an old man like me.

FLORENCE
I’m just being silly.

REV. WOOLLETT
Could you not talk to your mother?

FLORENCE cannot restrain another nervous laugh. The idea is preposterous. She stands.

FLORENCE
I should go.

REV. WOOLLETT
Stay just a little longer. There’s something I want to say...

She waits, but she does not sit.

REV. WOOLLETT (CONT’D)
You can change your mind, you can delay. There’s no rush, everybody will understand. So your father’s ordered a marquee, your mother is getting measured for a dress, invitations are at the printers - Flo, these are minor details, trifles compared to what’s at stake. It’s not too late to hold back.

FLORENCE is smiling. She senses it is too late.

FLORENCE
I really have to go. I’m giving a lesson.

As she turns a little too hurriedly to leave, she knocks over a low table bearing a teapot and cake, sends them flying to the floor. Her exclamation has an edge of hysterical energy.
FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Oh CHRIST! No, Oh God! No, I mean, hell, sorry, I didn’t mean to say that... or any of them, I’m so sorry, I’m sorry, oh look at this... this mess.

REV. WOOLLETT
Flo, it’s nothing. Nothing at all...

As FLORENCE drops to the floor to sort out the spill, we close in on REV WOOLLET to catch his worried look – which he shares with his WIFE, who has appeared in the doorway.

51 EXT. PORT MEADOW. DAY.
Long shot, moody, in falling light. FLORENCE walks alone across the empty meadow.

52 INT. PONTINGS HOUSE. FLORENCE’S BEDROOM. DAY.
FLORENCE is practising her scales, RUTH is lying on the bed, bored. In a pause, while FLORENCE turns to look for a sheet of music –

RUTH
It was a simple question.

FLORENCE
You’re not old enough.

RUTH
Stupid! Perhaps you’re just getting married because Daddy wants you to.

FLORENCE finds her music and plays aggressively. (Gigue from the E major partita?)

But RUTH’S remarks have needled her.

She puts her violin down and comes to sit by her sister.

RUTH (CONT’D)
I can do your hair.

She takes a brush.
RUTH (CONT’D)
So. Come on. Why do you love him?

FLORENCE
One. Aren’t you going to take notes?
One. He’s not like anyone else.

RUTH
No one is.

FLORENCE
You’d be surprised. Two. He always has a history book in his pocket, and a pencil stub. Three. He knows the names of trees and flowers and constellations. And... he wears plimsoles, never shoes...

RUTH
With his toes poking out. Mummy goes on about that.

FLORENCE
He’s the only man I know who doesn’t smoke. And he’s so strong – have you seen his hands? He says unpredictable things. And... um he’s going to write a series of history books about minor characters caught up in famous events. How many’s that? He’s not too proud to work as a cricket groundsman. He only has one tie and he wears it all the time. And do you know what?

She drops the whimsical tone. She turns to her sister.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Sometimes when we’re talking, I see these soft brown eyes looking at me, and I feel like I’m... wrapped in a cloud of love. A friendly cloud of love.

RUTH
And his socks never match.

FLORENCE
Exactly.
RUTH
And he doesn’t know the difference between a croissant and a baguette.

FLORENCE
That’s why I love him!

RUTH
And d’you know what Mummy called him?

FLORENCE
Oh God. What?

RUTH
I heard her on the phone to Iris Murdoch. She said he’s a bit of a country bumpkin!

The doorbell rings.

FLORENCE
That’s him!

She jumps up.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Did she really say that?

RUTH
And did you hear? He’s got to play tennis with Daddy.

FLORENCE speaks from the door.

FLORENCE
No! What if Edward wins?

RUTH
Daddy’ll throw him out.

FLORENCE leaves. RUTH mutters to herself –

RUTH (CONT’D)
Or hang himself.
INT. PONTING HOUSE. HALLWAY. DAY.

FLORENCE yanks open the front door to reveal EDWARD, disheveled, awkward, holding a duffel bag. He has just hitch-hiked in from the Chilterns. They embrace.

RUTH, always nosey, observes from halfway up the stairs.

FLORENCE
Edward. I love you.

EDWARD
And I love you. And I’m sorry I’m late. No one would stop for mes.

FLORENCE
They’re idiots.

EDWARD
Perhaps I should get a haircut. Or a new jacket or something.

FLORENCE
Come and see your room.

She leads him up the stairs

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Mummy’s put you in the small room, right at the top. As far away from me as possible.

EDWARD
Very sensible.

INT. PONTING HOUSE. TOP FLOOR. DAY.

EDWARD
It’s enormous.

FLORENCE
Betty washed the clothes you left.

EDWARD
This shirt’s never been ironed before. Looks new.
They speak between kisses.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
You’re beautiful.

FLORENCE
Put your arms right round me... I like that... Daddy wants to show you the factory.

EDWARD
Ah, the job... Let me kiss your vibrato.

He kisses the tips of her fingers.

FLORENCE
Stupid! Do you think you can be a salesman and write history books?

EDWARD
Someone’s got to try it.

FLORENCE
And the insurance came through. You’re allowed to drive the Humber...

EDWARD
Bliss...

FLORENCE
Which means you have to take Mummy to her lecture in Winchester.

EDWARD
Ecstasy...

FLORENCE
Which means I love you... and Ruth says you’re playing tennis with Daddy.

We are in close - the rapid kisses, the breathy asides.

EDWARD
No. Florence. I’m hopeless. It’s ridiculous. I can’t even -
FLORENCE
That’s not what you said at dinner.

EDWARD
I know but -

FLORENCE
It’s all right. He’ll simply want to thrash you. Just let him.

EDWARD
But... you’re mine now. I want... to thrash him.

FLORENCE
Don’t... you... dare.

INT. PONTING HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY.

RUTH brandishes various vegetables under EDWARD’S nose. She’s unconsciously flirting with him, dancing around him, a little out of control. FLORENCE is amused, tolerant. EDWARD hides his ignorance behind his jokiness.

EDWARD
Um, let’s see now. A coelacanth.

RUTH
Courgette! And this?

EDWARD
This one I know. We had it the other night boiled in horse’s blood. It’s a grabchick.

RUTH
Aubergine, stupid! And this one?

FLORENCE
Calm down, Ruthie.

EDWARD
Everyone knows that’s a croissant

RUTH
Endive! Don’t you know anything?
GEOFFREY PONTING has entered the kitchen unobserved. He is a tough, compact man, awkward and intense, who always wanted sons, not daughters. The girls are never relaxed in his presence.

GEOFFREY
Ruth, that’s not how I ever want to hear you talk to an adult.

RUTH
Sorry.

EDWARD
Oh, she’s all right. She was just, you know -

GEOFFREY
I thought we’d go straight from the works to the court.

EDWARD
I’ll get my stuff.

EDWARD meets FLORENCE’S eye. She is behind her father and, unseen by him, makes a ‘go easy’ gesture with a downward movement of her palm.

GEOFFREY turns to her.

GEOFFREY
Mummy’s got tutorials until six. Why don’t you cook tonight.

FLORENCE
All right.

GEOFFREY
Well, don’t sound too bloody enthusiastic about it! If you can’t be bothered someone can go out and get fish and chips.

EDWARD has paused in the doorway for this exchange. He sees how cowed FLORENCE is by her father.

FLORENCE
No, Daddy, I want to, honestly. I’ll make something special.
GEOFFREY
Right then. I’ll get you a racket.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM. DAY.

EDWARD and FLORENCE on the bed as before, but now she lies on her back and he is at her side, propped on an elbow, her head cradled against his arm. He is still gently touching her.

For the first time in their relationship, she is beginning to succumb to his caress, to a swelling physical sensation of pleasure that is transfixing her, melting her.

He looks down at her. Her breathing is deep and steady, like a sleeper’s. Her gaze roll upwards.

Close on EDWARD - his indecision. All is going smoothly, but what next? He whispers?

EDWARD
Florence...?

Her lips part as if to speak his name, but no sound comes. He moves his hand and begins to remove her knickers. But he needs her cooperation.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Flo...

As she raises her buttocks, the bed squeaks mournfully as before.

EDWARD’S hand is now at full stretch and he cannot get her knickers past her knees without disturbing this promising arrangement of their bodies.

She bends her knees, and he unhooks the knickers free of her ankle and lets them drop.

Now she is in his arms, waiting, but he is fully dressed. Trying not to disturb her, he attempts to undo one of his black leather lace-up shoes.

It is not possible.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Florence, don’t move. Ok? Florence?
The moment is precious, easily disrupted. EDWARD gently disengages his arm. As he leaves the bed, it bleats and squeaks again.

Desperate not to lose the moment, he stumbles against a chair as he hurries across the room and starts to take off his clothes as fast and as quietly as he can.

Naked, but for his unbuttoned shirt, he stands at the foot of the bed, gazing at FLORENCE. She has not moved. Her gaze is still upwards. She looks beautiful in her attitude of abandon, her dress rucked up around her thighs, ropes of tangled hair spread across the counterpane. EDWARD has been thinking of this moment for over a year. He takes a deep silent breath, taps the breast pocket of his shirt where his contraceptives are, and moves towards her.

EXT. CRICKET GROUND IN CHILTERNs. DAY.

June 1962. Late morning. The explosive crack of leather on willow. And a shout. We are in the practice nets by a rural cricket pitch.

Pulling away from the CRICKETERS there, we find EDWARD at a distance, marking out the boundary.

Close in. A CAPTAIN of the local village team is approaching him.

CAPTAIN
That wicket will want rolling again before tomorrow.

EDWARD
It’ll be done, Mr Rammage.

We follow EDWARD as he pushes his machine, marking out chalky white against the brilliant green.

He stops to mop his brow, glances towards the pavilion, and double-takes.

Across the field, sitting in the deep shadow of a huge old oak by the pavilion is FLORENCE.
EDWARD (CONT’D)

Florence!

With a delighted laugh, EDWARD begins to walk, then run towards her.

FLORENCE gets to her feet, picks up her canvas satchel and runs towards him. She wears a dandelion in her buttonhole and has tied her hair with a scrap of coloured velvet.

Among the cricketers at the nets, knowing nods and winks.

EDWARD AND FLORENCE embrace. In their excitement, between kisses, they talk over each other, oblivious to the onlookers by the nets.

EDWARD (CONT’D)

How did you get here? How long have you...

FLORENCE

I took the train to Henley and walked through the woods. I had a map. Didn’t get lost once... Seven miles!

EDWARD

And you’ve been watching me...

FLORENCE

For half an hour. Loving you at a distance. Waiting for you to see me.

EDWARD

I was thinking about you just then, and I looked up, and there you were. I thought you were a hallucination!

FLORENCE

Sitting quietly, loving you so hard. Oh Edward, I came by that little church you told me about...

EDWARD

You liked it.

FLORENCE

I wish we could be married there.
EDWARD
Now that wouldn’t please your father.

FLORENCE
I leaned by the wall, looking down across the valley and I ate an orange and checked the map and I thought, He’s only two miles away now! I was so happy, I’m so happy!

EXT. CRICKET GROUND IN THE CHILTERNs. DAY.

The pitch now deserted but for EDWARD and FLORENCE. Between them they haul a massive roller over the wicket.

EXT. WOODS, FIELDS. DAY.

Half an hour later. EDWARD and FLORENCE walk together through the beech woods. And along an avenue of limes. She tugs on his arm for a kiss. They walk on.

Further on, by the edge of the wood. He puts a hand on her shoulder and points.

EDWARD
There it goes. Did you see it?

FLORENCE
Yellowhammer?

EDWARD
No! It was going fast and low over the hedge.

FLORENCE
Greenfinch?

EDWARD
Sparrowhawk. Florence! The only ones you’ve ever get right are robins.

FLORENCE
And blackbirds.
EDWARD
What am I to do with you?

FLORENCE
Love me.

EDWARD
Oh, all right. If you insist. This way. Almost home.

60 EXT. BY COTTAGE. DAY.

Minutes later. The COUPLE emerge from a footpath through the woods onto the green in front of the cottage.

EDWARD
She won’t remember you.

FLORENCE
You say that every time. But she might one day.

61 INT. COTTAGE. SITTING ROOM. DAY.

As EDWARD and FLORENCE enter, MARJORIE rises, confused, alarmed, amid her habitual disorder and squalor. Her hair is awry, flecked with gold and green where she has been trying to paint it. She is naked above the waist.

We catch EDWARD’S pained look.

But FLORENCE, as she goes towards MARJORIE, smoothly picks up the discarded blouse and slips it over the older woman’s shoulders. FLORENCE buttons it for her as she speaks.

FLORENCE
Marjorie, hello, it’s Florence. I’ve come to see you.

MARJORIE
Me? Why me? I’ve done nothing wrong.

FLORENCE
I’ve brought you something interesting. From the Ashmolean.

(MORE)
FLORENCE (CONT'D)
We talked about it before. You told me
things I never knew...

FLORENCE reaches into her satchel and brings out a large post
card reproduction. It fills our view, in all its vividness.

MARJORIE
Ah yes! Uccello. The Hunt in the
Forest. His last... look at that
perspective.

FLORENCE
You told me that when he was young he
painted his fields blue in protest at
the boring food.

MARJORIE
Yes, Vasari says the Abbot gave him
cheese soup followed by cheese pie.
Every day!

The two women laugh.

On EDWARD. Some emotion welling up, (gratitude, love) which he
contains as he turns away.

FLORENCE
I thought we could paint it, make a
copy together.

EDWARD
I’ll make some tea.

MARJORIE
A forgery!

We follow Edward out to -

62

INT. COTTAGE. KITCHEN. DAY.

62

The customary stinking mess, clouds of flies, etc. EDWARD leans
by the sink, recovers himself, pinches a tear from the bridge of
his nose. Fills the kettle.
EXT. STEEP COUNTRY ROAD. DAY.

Early evening, same day. At the end of a day’s work in Henley, LIONEL pushes his bike up the hill towards the cottage. Piled in the bike’s wicker basket are school exercise books for marking.

Top of the hill gained, LIONEL mounts his bike.

INT. COTTAGE. KITCHEN. DAY.

FLORENCE is sorting out the kitchen. EDWARD is her helper. He is at the sink scrubbing pots, she is on her hands and knees, wooden spoon in hand, peering under the stove, retrieving something. There is a stew cooking.

FLORENCE
There are two more under here. Sprouting, but they’ll do. Peel’em and chuck’em in.

She hands the potatoes to EDWARD and surveys the room.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Then we’re going to do something about this floor. Is there a bucket or...

She is interrupted by a squeal from the sitting room.

HARRIET AND ANNE
Florence! Florence!

INT. COTTAGE. SITTING ROOM. DAY.

We follow FLORENCE in. HARRIET and ANNE sit at the table, flanking their mother, their arms round her shoulders. They’ve all been painting. The twins display for us the work - MARJORIES’S, of course.

We are looking at a striking, impressionistic, sized-up poster-paint version of the Uccello, or rather, a detail from it. Horsemens, wild-eyed horses, spears, woods. The colours are thick and swirling, as in a Van Gogh.

Unnoticed, LIONEL has appeared in the facing doorway.
FLORENCE is genuinely amazed, touched by the painting. EDWARD is now behind her.

FLORENCE
It’s beautiful. It really is.

HARRIET
We helped. I did some green.

ANNE
So did I. And brown.

HARRIET
But it was Mum.

ANNE
It was truly Mum.

MARJORIE
In Uccello the horses know everything. They were wild once, you see, but they’ve swapped sides. They’re with the hunters now. They feel guilty. You see it in their eyes.

On LIONEL, taking it in, the sudden cohesion in the household, the brief reincarnation of the MARJORIE he used to know. His gaze travels from the painting to FLORENCE. He quietly nods in acknowledgement.

LIONEL
Beautiful... Thank you.

ANNE
Good old Mum.

HARRIET
We love you.

FLORENCE half smiles, lowers her gaze.

FLORENCE
Come on, Edward. Lots to do.
INT. COTTAGE. BATHROOM. DAY.

In the chaotic bathroom, MARJORIE’S head is lowered over the hand basin while FLORENCE washes her hair.

INT. COTTAGE. KITCHEN. DAY.

The kitchen is in order. The FIVE are seated around a small pine table as FLORENCE brings the stew (rather thin, mostly carrots and potatoes) from the stove. FLORENCE is about to pick up a ladle but EDWARD’S restraining hand closes over hers.

MARJORIE (in fresh clothes, brushed hair) takes up the ladle and sets about doling out the stew. She addresses her remarks to FLORENCE.

MARJORIE
I’m so glad you’re here, my dear. I’ve been wanting to try this out. An old gypsy recipe. Rabbit stewed in plums. All day on a low heat.

Before FLORENCE can reply, EDWARD cuts in.

EDWARD
Our mum’s a very good cook.

FLORENCE
It smells delicious.

MARJORIE
D’you have children of your own, dear?

FLORENCE
Not yet.

MARJORIE
People romanticise, but it’s awfully hard work. I make all our own jam, marmalade, chutney. Shopping, laundry, cleaning – it never stops.

LIONEL
And you do a wonderful job, Marjorie.

EDWARD and the TWINS murmur their agreement. MARJORIE pauses. Her smile is of dreamy contentment.
MARJORIE
I do my best.

FLORENCE finds EDWARD’S hand and squeezes.

INT. BOAT. NIGHT.
Summer 1952. We are close on the young FLORENCE. She lies on her bunk, as before, the radio tinnily playing the piano duet.

At the sound of a creaking board, she turns her gaze towards the steps that lead on deck.

The shadow of a descending figure grows larger.

INT. HOTEL SUITE. BEDROOM. DAY.
July 1962. We are close on FLORENCE, anxiously, passively waiting.

The bed tilts and makes its lonesome moan as EDWARD climbs beside her.

FLORENCE’S POV upwards - His face moves to fill her view entirely. His expression is of wonder, expectancy.

Awkwardly, she lifts her head so that he can slot his arm under it, to cushion it as before.

He lowers his head and they kiss tenderly. And again. Only the sound of the sea, breaking gently and withdrawing. Their faces are close.

They look long at each other. What next?

EDWARD
Are you all right?

FLORENCE
Yes, yes, Of course.

EDWARD
(whispers)
I love you.
FLORENCE
(too hastily)
I love you.

The bed creaks again as EDWARD’S hand travels the length of her body, pulling back the hem of her skirt up to her waist.

FLORENCE tenses, catches her breath.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Edward, tell me something, say something kind... no, something stupid... like you used to.

A pause as he gazes down at her. He understands.

EDWARD
(solemnly, in her ear)
Miss Ponting, you have a clavicle and a philtrum all men wish to play on and a vibrato all men adore, but you belong entirely to me and I’m very glad and proud.

She laughs nervously.

FLORENCE
In that case, you may kiss my vibrato.

He takes her left hand and kisses the tips of her fingers.

EDWARD
Such hard calluses in so soft a woman.

FLORENCE
And my philtrum...

Then they kiss again and -

Close on FLORENCE to catch her wide-eyed expression as EDWARD tenses his arms and suddenly rolls on top of her. His elbows and forearms are planted on either side of her head.

And her POV of EDWARD - his own amazement, and uncertainty.

EDWARD
There... Is that... am I squashing you?
FLORENCE
No... not really...

EXT. LONDON SHOPPING STREET. DAY.

May. 1962. FLORENCE and EDWARD have paused in front of a shop window display of bridal gowns.

EDWARD
Flo, it’s easy. Just point and choose.

FLORENCE
But you’re not meant to see it.

He opens the door for her.

INT. BRIDAL WEAR SHOP. DAY.

The COUPLE are among ranks of foamy gowns.

FLORENCE

EDWARD
White...

An ASSISTANT is hurrying towards them. But FLORENCE is already edging towards the door.

FLORENCE
Can’t face it. Let’s get out. We’re late for rehearsal.

ASSISTANT
Can I help you young people?

FLORENCE has walked on.

EDWARD
She’s... er. Too creamy and frilly.
Sorry mate.
INT. REHEARSAL ROOM. LONDON. DAY.

As before. A handful of students looking in on the rehearsal. EDWARD is slumped in the back row.

The ENNISMORE QUARTET plus ELSBETH, the extra viola, is about to begin work on the Mozart Quintet.

FLORENCE is putting on her Alice band.

CHARLES
Who’s that fellow at the back?

FLORENCE
Just someone.

CHARLES
Looks a bit rough.

FLORENCE snaps open her music.

FLORENCE
Let’s start, shall we. Charles.

CHARLES rolls his eyes. A competitor! With a frown of concentration, he plays the opening, the others respond, the Quintet begins.

On EDWARD. The music bores him instantly. His eyes are beginning to close.

Then they open. His POV over the shoulder of the STUDENT sitting in front of him.

He is looking with adoration at his wife to be. The straight back, the poise and command, her beauty...

INT. PRIMARY SCHOOL. HALL. NIGHT.

EDWARD and FLORENCE are among parents at a school concert.

On stage, in a pool of light, a pretty eight year old GIRL, their daughter, straight-backed, solemn, wearing an Alice band and lifting her violin to her chin.

FLORENCE is tense. EDWARD reassuringly puts a hand on her knee.
The GIRL plays a simple melody to a TEACHER’S piano accompaniment.

CUT TO:

After the concert. EDWARD kneels to receive the embrace of his daughter. Still holding her violin in one hand, bow in the other, she loops her arms around his neck and presses her cheek against his.

74 INT. REHEARSAL ROOM. LONDON. DAY. 74

The music continues, EDWARD dozes.

75 EXT. LONDON STREET. DAY. 75

EDWARD and FLORENCE walk along. He is protesting.

EDWARD
No honestly. I loved it. I often listen with my eyes closed. Listen, I can even sing it.

He sings the opening four notes of the Quintet, with a bluesey emphasis.

FLORENCE
(kissing him)
I take it back. Come on. I want to show you where I used to work.

76 INT. WIGMORE HALL. STAIRS. DAY. 76

FLORENCE leads EDWARD up the rear stairs of the Hall, and shows him through a door.

77 INT. WIGMORE HALL. GREEN ROOM. DAY. 77

FLORENCE
This is where the performers wait to go on stage. And afterwards I’d serve them drinks here. I once made a cup of tea for Benjamin Britten...
EDWARD is unimpressed, and trying not to be.

EDWARD
Ah yes, the uh famous...

FLORENCE crosses to another door. She’s in a state of excitement, desperate to share it.

FLORENCE
And this peephole. I’d hear the applause and watch like this, and when the players started to leave the stage, I’d have to open it smoothly, without being seen...

She has opened the door onto the stage. EDWARD is bemused as he follows her out.

78  INT. WIGMORE HALL. STAGE. DAY.  78

FLORENCE
... Can you imagine the terror and the thrill of stepping out here to play your first concert... these are discerning audiences.

EDWARD
Yes, I suppose it would be something...

FLORENCE
I just know the Ennismore will play here one day.

She takes his arm, kisses him.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
And when we do, I’ll choose the Mozart Quintet, the one you can sing...

Getting into the spirit of her excitement at last, he sings the four notes again, comically mimicking a seated, frowning CHARLES.

FLORENCE laughs.
FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Yes! We’ll play it beautifully. The critic from the Times will be there. We’ll triumph. And it will be yours, it’ll be specially for you. It’s my promise.

EDWARD has jumped down into the auditorium and is going along a row.

EDWARD
And I’ll be here, dead centre, three rows back, ready to shout at the end – what is it they shout?

FLORENCE
Bravo.

EDWARD
Bravo! Bravo the Ennismore Quartet!

A CLEANING LADY at the rear of the hall looks up, startled.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
This is where I’ll be, Florence, in this very seat. Number 9, row C. That’s my promise!

FLORENCE
Oh God. I love you.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM. DAY.

EDWARD lying on top of FLORENCE.

But not much is happening. EDWARD jabs and bumps against FLORENCE, but cannot find a way in.

She tries to lie still, jolted a little this way and that by his efforts. She is as determined as ever to get through this, to make it work.

They talk over each other.

EDWARD
It’s all right. It’s all right. I just can’t quite... lie still... sorry...
FLORENCE finds it difficult to breath.

    FLORENCE
    Sorry... if you could...

    EDWARD
    What is it?

    FLORENCE
    If you could lift... sorry, just a little.

    EDWARD
    I’m trying.... sorry... But I can’t... I’m sorry I don’t...

On FLORENCE. She remembers.

    FLORENCE (V.O.)
    And now the foreplay is concluded, he lies on top of her...

    EDWARD
    I’m sorry... I’m really sorry...

    FLORENCE (V.O.)
    And it is perfectly acceptable for her to use a hand gently to guide her husband in...

As we hear this, we follow FLORENCE’S hand as it travels towards her groin. EDWARD lifts to let her hand through.

Close on EDWARD’S face as he feels her hand on him. He is suddenly stilled.

    EDWARD
    Oh... Florence.

His expression becomes dreamy as FLORENCE continues to move her hand.

    EDWARD (CONT’D)
    No...

    FLORENCE
    (whispers)
    It’s going to be all right...
EDWARD
It's too...

FLORENCE
...in here...

But EDWARD knows he is beginning the irrecoverable slide to orgasm.

EDWARD
No... it's too... Flo...

EDWARD gives out a wail, a complicated series of agonised, rising vowels.

FLORENCE
Darling, what is it? Did I hurt you? Edward?

Shocked, she pulls her hand away as EDWARD rises up with a bewildered look. He is lost. His back arches in spasms, he lets out a hoarse shout as his orgasm overwhelms him.

On FLORENCE. Frozen in horror.

EDWARD
Oh my God...

Sudden silence. EDWARD pulls away.

Florence continues to lie still on her back. What is changing is her breathing. By degrees it is becoming shallower, more rapid.

We see a single trickle running down her side and into the sheet.

She is fighting to stay calm. And losing. Something powerful is about to erupt, it is slowly beginning to overwhelm her sense of self-control - primal disgust, visceral horror at a buried memory disinterred.

She cannot help herself. Her breathing is fast. She lets out a cry of revulsion.

EDWARD watches amazed.
She scrambles to her knees, snatches a pillow and frenetically, hysterically, tries to wipe herself with it, letting out cries of utter disgust.

She is sobbing. And in contrast to this frenzied, uncontrolled behaviour, there FADES UP the sad beauty of the Rachmaninov piano duet, the music she heard a long time ago on her father’s boat. She shouts –

FLORENCE
Don’t look at me! Please don’t look at me! Stop looking at me!

Her efforts with the pillow are hopeless. With a cry of frustration she hurls it down.

She leaps from the bed, snatches up her shoes, runs through the sitting room, past their abandoned meal, and out the door, slamming it behind her.

80  INT. HOTEL LOUNGE. HALL. DAY.

As before, but now there is a soporific after-dinner air. Whisky, bridge, one or two GUESTS dozing.

FLORENCE runs barefoot past the doorway, unobserved. She passes WAITERS ONE and TWO as they carry in trays of drinks. They give her a quizzical look.

81  EXT. HOTEL GARDEN.

FLORENCE runs out onto the lawn, stoops to put on her shoes, runs towards the beach.

82  INT. HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM. DAY.

EDWARD lies on his back on the bed staring numbly at the ceiling.

83  INT. GEOFFREY’S CAR. DAY

May 1962. GEOFFREY at the wheel of his Humber.
GEOFFREY
You any good, by the way?

EDWARD
Pretty useless, actually.

GEOFFREY
Everyone says that. You probably think because you’re young you’re going to slaughter me. Well, my friend, think again. Anyway, here it is...

He pulls into a parking area in front of a small industrial building.

They get out of the car.

GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
Old Ministry of Defence place. Bought it for next to nothing.

EDWARD looks at the building with foreboding. He follows GEOFFREY in.

INT. FACTORY. DAY.

About twenty people working on assembly benches.

GEOFFREY
Mostly special stuff made to order for labs. This oscilloscope is being adapted for Oxford’s engineering department. A lot of work is for universities. But we could do more...

A little bewildered, EDWARD, a highly non-technical person, follows GEOFFREY along the benches.

GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
You’d need to spend a couple of months here learning what we do, get your mind round some basic electronics...

They pass along a dingy corridor.
GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
Then you’ll go round the universities, explain our services, drum up business for us.

GEOFFREY opens a door and turns on a light.

GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
You’ll even have your own office.

EDWARD is looking into a tiny, windowless room, barely more than a cupboard, piled with junk.

EDWARD
Will I get a desk?

EXT. TENNIS COURT. DAY.

A sweaty, energetic, highly determined GEOFFREY serves with a mighty thwack. The ball flashes by EDWARD.

GEOFFREY
(immensely satisfied)
Six love. Two sets to me. One more?

EDWARD
I don’t know. I think I’d rather...

GEOFFREY
Your serve. Come on man. See if you can get a point. Just one point!

At last, almost by accident, EDWARD delivers a decent serve, down the line. It is difficult to reach and GEOFFREY is too slow. We see the ball is in.

GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
(screams)
Out!

EDWARD
(to himself)
In.

He serves again. The ball flops into the net.
GEOFFREY
(triumphant)
Love fifteen!

EDWARD
(to himself)
I know.

CUT TO:

Minutes later. GEOFFREY to serve.

GEOFFREY
Forty love.

He serves. The ball is fast. EDWARD just gets his racket to it - and mis-hits.

EDWARD
Oops...

But he has hit an accidental drop-shot.

GEOFFREY runs frantically from the baseline.

He makes a desperate lunge, almost dives, but he does not make it.

He stands still, lifts his gaze to the sky, takes a deep breath in a show of a man mastering his feelings. He is furious with himself.

As he walks back to serve, he slaps his buttock with his racket.

GEOFFREY
For Godssakes man. Come on!

CUT TO:

Minutes later. GEOFFREY serves an ace.

GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
That’s it. Six love, six love, six love.

But he is not pleased. He had set himself the task of ensuring EDWARD did not get a point, and he has failed.
The two men pick up their stuff at the side of the court.

GEOFFREY (CONT’D)
I have to say it. Your single point, that drop shot was a complete fluke.

EDWARD
Well, no, actually, I’ve been working on that one.

GEOFFREY rams his racket into its frame, snatches EDWARD’S racket from him.

As GEOFFREY turns, he notices FLORENCE sitting on a bench to one side of the court. All his anger turns on her. EDWARD watches on amazed. The exchange takes place through the mesh of the court fencing.

GEOFFREY
For God’s sake! Florence! How long have you been sitting there?

FLORENCE
Not long at all. I thought I’d just...

GEOFFREY
I asked you a question, damnit. How long?

On FLORENCE. Clearly terrified.

FLORENCE
About twenty minutes.

GEOFFREY
About? About? What the hell do you think you’re up to? Did I invite you to come and spy on me? Well? Did I? Answer me!

FLORENCE is silent. GEOFFREY strides away.

EDWARD and FLORENCE exchange a helpless look through the mesh. She is in shock.
INT. HOTEL BEDROOM. DAY.

As before, EDWARD lies on his back, gazing at the ceiling.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

FLORENCE is walking, half running along the beach, desperate to put distance between herself and the hotel bedroom and all that has happened in it. But it is hard to make quick progress through the heavy shingle. She gasps in frustration as she almost loses her footing on a steep slope of stones.

INT. HOTEL SUITE, BEDROOM. DAY.

EDWARD, lying on the bed, stirred into anger, comes to a sudden decision. He gets up, crosses the room and begins to dress impatiently.

He stands in front of a mirror, runs a comb through his hair, begins to knot his tie.

He snatches up his jacket, puts it on as he strides through the sitting room, past the remains of the dinner.

INT. HOTEL LOUNGE. HALL. DAY.

EDWARD passes the lounge and its guests. In the corridor are the WAITERS, lounging, bored, smoking. They watch him hurry by with keen interest. A wedding narrative is building.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

Much further along the beach. FLORENCE is calmer now as she reaches a fallen tree. She leans with her back against it, staring at the breaking waves.

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

EDWARD angrily pounds his way across the shingle. He is talking to himself, sometimes close to shouting. Mostly we do not catch the words, but the fury is obvious.
EDWARD
Dammit.... Every time I tried... never
let me near her... she never once, not
once... I was an idiot! Idiot!

EXT. BEACH. DAY.

FLORENCE leans by the fallen tree.

EDWARD
Florence!

She looks up, startled. EDWARD is some way off, coming towards
her along the beach. The confrontation she dreads is about to
begin. She wanted to be on her own. Now she steels herself and
waits.

He stops some yards away. He is carrying his jacket under his
arm. He is breathing heavily. There is exasperation in his
voice.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
There you are.

FLORENCE turns away. EDWARD waits.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Did you really need to come this far.

FLORENCE
Yes.

EDWARD
It must be two miles back to the
hotel.

FLORENCE
I needed to get out.

Pause. EDWARD comes a little closer. The stones tinkle under his
feet. He draws breath, prepares to tell her what he has come to say.

EDWARD
Look, this is ridiculous. It was
unfair of you to run out like that.
FLORENCE
Was it?

EDWARD
In fact, it was unpleasant. Bloody unpleasant.

FLORENCE
Yes.

EDWARD
What do you mean, yes?

FLORENCE closes her eyes, forces herself to say this.

FLORENCE
It was all absolutely revolting.

EDWARD has found his anger again. He takes another step nearer.

EDWARD
You don’t have the faintest idea how to be with a man, do you? If you did it would never have happened. In all this time, you’ve never let me near you. I’m never... I’m not allowed to touch you, or see you properly. I can’t do this, can’t do this. You don’t know a thing about any of it, do you? You carry on as if it’s eighteen sixty two. You don’t even know how to kiss.

FLORENCE is frightened, horrified.

FLORENCE
You said you loved kissing me.

EDWARD
And I’m not going to be humiliated by you.

FLORENCE
I didn’t... Please don’t bully me.

EDWARD
I’m not bullying you.
FLORENCE
Yes you are. Edward, you are!

EDWARD
You’re talking bloody nonsense.

FLORENCE
I’m trying to...

EDWARD
You’re the one who stops us getting close. When we hold hands you think you’re doing me a favour. You’re so stuck up!

FLORENCE
Is that what you think...?

EDWARD
It bloody well is what I think...

FLORENCE
Then why are you here? Why are you chasing me down the beach? Why can’t you let me sit here by myself

He does not answer. After raised voices, silence. They pull back from a full-on row. The mood level subsides. Florence is thoughtful.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Edward, I want to make you happy. But I think I’m always a disappointment. You’re always advancing, I’m always backing away. And we can’t talk about it. We can never just be happy. Or just be. You’re always demanding something more, and I’m useless at, you know... And you go silent and unhappy and it’s all my fault. And when I do, I mean when I say yes to something even if I don’t really want to, I know there’ll be another thing that I’m expected to do... I’m no good at these demands...

This word gets to him.
EDWARD
Demands?

FLORENCE
Well, what I mean is...

EDWARD
Demands? You think I’m some sort of debt collector.

He is suddenly suspicious. Or can’t help himself deliberately misunderstanding her.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
I hope you’re not talking about money.

CLOSE on FLORENCE. It was the last thing she meant. She wants to put him right..

FLORENCE
Of course I’m not...

EDWARD
That’s it, isn’t it? Money?

FLORENCE
Honestly, I wasn’t talking about...

EDWARD
I don’t care about money...

FLORENCE
I didn’t mention money, Edward.

EDWARD
... yours or anyone’s.

FLORENCE
I know you don’t...

EDWARD
So keep your money, your father’s money. Get a new violin. Don’t waste it on anything I might use.

She stares at him, amazed.
EDWARD (CONT’D)
You think I ‘demanded’ that job from your father. It was your idea. And d’you know what? I don’t want to work for him. Tell him I’ve changed my mind.

FLORENCE
I know you don’t mean that. It’s just because you’re feeling...

EDWARD
I bloody well do.

In his exasperation he wheels away from her. He walks down to the shoreline. He kicks violently at the stones and comes back towards her.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
But why did you run off? You shouldn’t have done that.

FLORENCE
I’ve already told you.

EDWARD
You wanted to humiliate me.

FLORENCE
No, honestly. It’s something... I can’t explain it... I don’t know what it is... why I ran away... I got in such a state... I was ashamed...

EDWARD
So you humiliated me.

Suddenly, she snaps.

FLORENCE
All right then. If that’s what you really want me to say. If that’s the kind of person you want me to be. I was trying to humiliate you. Perhaps you should learn to control yourself.

He is close to her. The words are out before he can stop them.
EDWARD
You’re a bitch talking like that.

FLORENCE flinches. The powerful word explodes around them. She is almost shouting.

FLORENCE
If that’s what you think then get away from me! Just clear off will you, Edward. Don’t you understand? I came out here to be alone. Please go away!

In distress, weary of arguing, she has turned her back on him. He hovers uncertainly, regretting his word.

Into the silence, from the woods on the inland side of the Fleet lagoon, comes the clear sound of birdsong.

FLORENCE half turns to listen. They both listen. The sound is like an accusation, a reminder of their past happiness.

EDWARD
(quietly)
I loved you. But you make it so hard.

On FLORENCE as she takes this in, the implications of the tense.

FLORENCE
You loved me?

EDWARD
We could be so free with each other. We could make each other so happy. Instead we’re in this mess.

Again, FLORENCE considers this.

FLORENCE
Yes.

EDWARD
Meaning what exactly?

FLORENCE
It’s a mess.

EDWARD
It’s hopeless.
FLORENCE

Is it?

They have reached the tidal turning point in their row. Tentatively, EDWARD stretches out a hand and rests it on her shoulder. She does not turn, but nor does she resist him.

They hear the birdsong again.

At last she turns.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)

Is it a nightingale?

EDWARD

It’s a blackbird.

FLORENCE

At night?

EDWARD

It must be a prime site he’s on. He’s doing overtime, having to work hard... Like me.

She can’t help herself - her laughter is spontaneous and delighted. EDWARD’S remark brings back to her the man she fell in love with.

Encouraged, he tries to take her hand. But she slips away. As the laughter dies on her lips, she is coming to a momentous decision.

FLORENCE

Edward... no, please. There’s something I want to say to you. It’s not...

She is on the edge of changing her mind.

EDWARD

What?

FLORENCE

You know I love you.

EDWARD

Still.
FLORENCE
Very very much. And I know you love me. I want to spend my life with you. And you feel the same. It ought to be quite simple, but it isn’t. We’re in a mess like you said. Even with all this love. And I also know that it’s my fault. We both know why. Edward, it must be obvious to you by now that I’m...

EDWARD
Florence, what is it?

As she falters he tries to touch her again, but she raises a hand. She is determined to say the difficult thing.

FLORENCE
... that I’m pretty hopeless, no, absolutely hopeless at sex. I’m no good at it. I don’t seem to need it like other people, like you do. It isn’t a part of me, I don’t like it, I keep trying to pretend, but I... I don’t know why. I might change, but I can’t imagine it. If I don’t say this now we’ll always be struggling with it. It’s going to cause you a lot of unhappiness, and me too...

EDWARD is silent now, unreadable. She is scared, but she makes herself go on.

FLORENCE (CONT’D)
Look, I’ve thought about this carefully. It’s not as stupid as it sounds. I mean, on first hearing. We love each other, we know how happy we make each other. We’re free to make our own choices, shape our lives as we please. These days people live in all kinds of ways now, they can live by their own rules without asking anyone’s permission.

EDWARD
I don’t understand what you’re...
FLORENCE
Mummy knows two homosexuals - they
live in a flat together, like man and
Street. They both teach at the
University. And we can make our own
rules too, Edward. I can say this
because I know you love me. We don’t
have to be like everyone else. We
could live together and... and so, and
no one would know what we did or
didn’t do. We’d be together, and if
you wanted, really wanted, that’s to
say, whenever it happened, and of
course it would happen, I would
understand, more than that, I’d want
it because I want you to be happy and
free. I’d never be jealous, as long as
I knew that you loved me...

EDWARD gasps, then moans as he grasps what she is trying to say. But she presses on.

EDWARD
Oh God...

FLORENCE
Honestly, my darling, I just want to
be with you all my life, look after
you, be happy with you, and work with
the quartet and one day at Wigmore
Hall play something glorious and
beautiful for you...

EDWARD at last comes to the boil. His fury makes him hoarse. He
can barely get the words out.

EDWARD
Have I... have I got this right? You
want me to go with other women. Is
that it?

She is shocked by his fury. Her voice is small.

FLORENCE
Not if you didn’t want to.
EDWARD
You’re telling me I could do it with anyone I liked but you.

FLORENCE cannot speak. Her proposal turns out to be as unacceptable as she half suspected.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
Have you actually forgotten that we were married today? We’re not two old queers living in secret on Beaumont Street. We’re man and wife!

Angrily EDWARD seizes a large smooth stone and smacks it into his left palm and back into his right.

He is close to shouting. The hand that holds the stone is raised as he takes a step towards her.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
With my body I thee worship! That’s what you promised today. In front of everybody. Are you so innocent and stupid you don’t realise how disgusting and ridiculous your idea is? And what an insult it is? An insult to me!

With a cry of frustration he turns and hurls the stone towards the sea. We follow it. It lands just short of the water’s edge.

He wheels round to face her again. She shrinks before him.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
You tricked me. You’re a fraud. And I know what else you are? Do you know what you are? You’re frigid, that’s what. Completely frigid. But you thought you needed a husband and I was the first bloody fool to come along.

On FLORENCE as this sinks in. She knows she never set out to deceive him, but she believes everything else is true. Her proposal was obscene, she broke her promise made in a church, she is frigid. She has let everyone down. In her own eyes as well as his, she is worthless.
She comes away from the washed-up tree and stands close in front of him. Her voice is only just above a whisper.

FLORENCE
   I am sorry, Edward. I am most terribly sorry...

She lingers, waiting, willing him to respond, to touch her and forgive her. But he remains silent.

She begins the long walk back to the hotel.

EXT. BEACH. SUNSET

Twenty minutes later. A LONG SHOT. EDWARD alone and furious, and shouting, pacing up and down the beach along the water’s edge, his words lost to us.

EXT. BEACH. NIGHT

A half hour later. The moon is up. EDWARD comes along the beach towards the hotel.

INT. HOTEL. HALL

A half hour later. As EDWARD comes in he confronts the two WAITERS. Their expressions of sympathy could be mockery - as always, it is impossible to tell.

EDWARD
   Oh... has my uh wife gone upstairs...

WAITER ONE
   Very sorry sir to hear about your father-in-law taken ill.

WAITER TWO
   Manager’s kindly given the young lady a lift to the station. Big hurry it was.

WAITER ONE
   On your special night and all.
EDWARD
Yes, it’s a... um a shame...
He brushes past them and runs up the stairs.

INT. HOTEL SUITE SITTING ROOM. NIGHT
EDWARD yanks open a wardrobe door. Empty.
Twenty minutes later. He is slumped in an armchair, drinking wine from the bottle. Numbly, he stares into space.
An hour later. EDWARD is asleep in the armchair. The wine bottle is on its side on the floor.

INT. HOTEL SUITE. SITTING ROOM. DAWN.
EDWARD is woken by the sound of birdsong.
Five minutes later. He stands by the remains of the wedding supper, eating cold roast potatoes, congealed meat, cheese, mints. He picks up FLORENCE’S unfinished glass of wine and downs it in one.
His suitcase is at his feet.

EXT. OUTSIDE HOTEL. DAY.
EDWARD slings his suitcase onto the back seat of the Humber, the Ponting’s family car.
He drives away.

EXT, COUNTRYSIDE. DAY
Drive-by. The Humber recedes into the rural beauty of Dorset.

EXT. OUTSIDE PONTING’S HOUSE. NORTH OXFORD. DAY
A couple of hours later, still early morning. EDWARD has parked the car in the driveway. He approaches the front door, pushes the keys through the letter box.
As he walks away, the front door opens.

RUTH
Edward... Edward!

But he ignores her and hurries away.

101 INT. TRAIN. DAY.
EDWARD asleep on the Oxford to Henley train.

102 EXT. WOODS NEAR COTTAGE. DAY.
Carrying his suitcase, EDWARD comes through the woods, in sight of the cottage. He pauses, collects himself. Breaking this news is not going to be easy.

103 INT. COTTAGE. KITCHEN, SITTING ROOM. DAY.
The family are in the kitchen, eating lunch. EDWARD comes through the sitting room. It is his mother who sees him first through the open door.

MARJORIE
Hello Edward love. Have you been at work?

He cannot speak. He looks rough. The rest of the family turn in their seats.

HARRIET
But where’s Florence?

LIONEL takes this in, its import. He stands.

LIONEL
Oh my God. Son...

104 EXT. COTTAGE GARDEN. DAY
Late afternoon on the same day. EDWARD is in fresh clothes. He has brought the twins, ANN and HARRIET to the bottom of the garden.
ANN
And what about all those presents?

EDWARD
They’ll all be sent back. Dad’s writing to Mrs Ponting.

HARRIET
Why can’t we see Florence?

ANN
We love her. Why won’t you tell us what’s happened?

EDWARD
Look, uh, one day when you’re grown up you’ll understand. But listen. I want you to make me a promise, a really solemn promise. That you’ll never ever mention her name to me again, or ask me any more questions about her. Do you understand?

On the twins. Their blank astonishment.

EDWARD (CONT’D)
I mean it... Hands on hearts.

Reluctant but obedient, they solemnly place a hand over their hearts.

HARRIET
Edward! This is so stupid!

105 INT. COTTAGE. LIONEL’S STUDY. NIGHT

A few days later. Father and son sit across from each other at a table where LIONEL does his marking. School exercise books and text books are piled around. A clock ticks heavily on a bookcase. The atmosphere is laden. So much is unsaid.

LIONEL
And the job. You’ll have to write to Mr Ponting.

EDWARD
I’ve already done it.
LIONEL
I’ve had a letter back from Florence’s mother. Here, you’d better read it.

EDWARD
I’d rather not.

LIONEL
Well. Anyway. It’s agreed. Non consummation...

A silence.

LIONEL (CONT’D)
(gently)
Come on, son. Is there really nothing you want to tell me?

EDWARD’S shake of the head is almost imperceptible.

LIONEL (CONT’D)
Are you sure?

EDWARD looks away.

SLOW FADE TO

106 EXT. OUTSIDE SHOP. CAMDEN. DAY.

1969. EDWARD is locking the steel shutters of his shop – ‘Ed’s Records’ – with heavy padlocks. The pavement at his feet is litter-strewn. EDWARD – long hair, tight jeans, leather jacket – looks cool. Standing to one side, waiting for him, is a girlfriend, MOLLY

He comes away from the shop, links arms with MOLLY. They walk on.

Relaxed in each other’s company, the couple walk along the Regents Canal.

107 INT. STAGE WINGS. NIGHT

A rock concert in progress on stage. EDWARD, the promoter of the event, is talking to a STAGE MANAGER in the wings. We cannot make out what is being said.
With an arm looped around EDWARD’S shoulder is another girlfriend, DANA. He breaks off his conversation to kiss her.

Closer.

EDWARD
... we brought our own PA and you’re charging us for yours. But that’s fine. We’ll balance the account at the end...

INT. OZ-TYPE EDITORIAL OFFICE. DAY.

In the background of the chaotic offices, MOLLY, DANA and other STAFF.

EDWARD studies some sample pages of an Oz-type counter culture magazine - orange print on purple paper, exploding images.

EDWARD
I think it’s way too legible... we need something like a sun-burst over the titles here...

EXT. WIGMORE STREET. DAY.

EDWARD is with a group of friends - MOLLY, DANA, two other girl, JANE and TINA, plus, two young men, PHIL and JACK.

They come noisily along the street, laughing. As they pass under the concert hall canopy EDWARD catches sight of a poster: ‘The Ennismore Quartet’, Mozart quintet D major. He slows to look. The others walk on.

MOLLY
Ed! Come on!

After a brief glance (he won’t be going) he catches up with his friends.

INT. APARTMENT. NIGHT.

The friends, EDWARD with MOLLY and DANA curled up on either side, and JANE with PHIL and JACK with TINA.
They sit and sprawl on cushions around a low table. On the table, many wine bottles, a lump of hash etc. It is the end of a long evening. The atmosphere is soporific - anecdotes interspersed with silences.

JANE
... so she borrowed this bike

PHIL
...nah, she stole it...

JANE
Went shooting down the hill, to his mother’s house and said, look, here’s your money back.

There are groans, some laughter, then silence. EDWARD’S story is sleepily understated.

EDWARD
It’s not always like that. I knew this couple once. Very straight. Sort of innocent and young. She was truly beautiful. And so they get married, the whole conventional thing, you know, church and cake and in-laws, honeymoon in a hotel by the sea. And on the big night it doesn’t quite work out, you know, in bed, and she gets upset and rushes out the room, goes miles along the beach. He follows her out and he’s truly pissed off, So he finds her and she tells him that she isn’t really into sex and that when they live together he can have it with anyone he likes, anyone but her...

A stir of approval, chuckles.

PHIL
Man, what an offer!

EDWARD
No, but that’s not it... you see, he’s furious when he hears this, I mean, who wouldn’t be? They were only married that afternoon. I don’t blame him or anything.

(MORE)
EDWARD (CONT'D)
But he doesn’t get what it is she’s
trying to tell him. He’s too angry, he
doesn’t see that... the thing is she
really loves him and she doesn’t want
to let him down... but she wants to be
with him, wants him to be happy... and
he can’t get it... and it all comes
apart that night on the beach, they
never see each other again... and
that’s how it goes, I guess...

EDWARD trails away. He has talked himself in the direction of a
conclusion he has never before spelled out to himself, and still
has not quite reached - that he made a terrible mistake.

The group talk over EDWARD’S final words and don’t notice his
disquiet or guess that he’s talking about himself.

They begin to discuss the bride’s offer (’not practical man... you kidding... paradise... look, if it was me... all right for
him’ etc) their voices fading as we CLOSE IN on EDWARD -
revaluating.

INT. WIGMORE HALL. NIGHT

The auditorium - crowded, with a few empty seats. A couple of
seconds of silence. FACES in the audience - tense, expectant,
good-willed.

We find a MUSIC CRITIC, grand, full-bearded, notebook on his
lap. A new, young, much-talked-about string quartet is about to
make its important debut.

On stage. The Ennismore Quartet - FLORENCE, JENNY, SONIA,
ELSBETH, CHARLES - ready to perform Mozart’s D major quintet.

On FLORENCE. She glances at the others. All set.

FLORENCE inclines her head towards CHARLES. He plays the
familiar rising four-note opening. The others play the lingering
response. Then the four notes again, on a different chord.

FADE TO:

Fifteen minutes later. The haunting Adagio. CLOSE on FLORENCE as
she plays the tender melody.
FACES in the audience. Then the MUSIC CRITIC - inscrutable.

FADE TO:

The last few bars and concluding chord of the stormy last movement. The music has barely finished when there is an exclamation of delight from someone in the audience. Followed by others, and loud ’bravos’

The dazed players stand to acknowledge the rapturous applause. Their nervous smiles.

MUSIC CRITIC (V.O.)
...and commanded with magisterial ease all the riches of Mozart’s late style stop. There followed a searingly expressive Adagio of consummate beauty and lyrical power. Stop.

On FLORENCE. She smiles across at the others. They’ve made it! She faces out towards the audience. We follow her gaze...

Toward the middle seat in the third row. 9c. Empty.

On FLORENCE again as she struggles with a flood of mixed emotions.

112 INT. GREEN ROOM BEHIND STAGE. NIGHT.

The MUSICIANS are just packing up their stuff and leaving. The mood is exultant, but FLORENCE is subdued.

JENNY
Are you coming Florence?

FLORENCE
I’ll catch you up.

113 INT. LOBBY OF WIGMORE HALL. NIGHT.

Half an hour later.

The lobby is almost deserted. The MUSIC CRITIC is using a payphone in a corner to phone in his copy.
MUSIC CRITIC
The leader comma Miss Florence Ponting comma in the youthful passion of her phrasing...no that’s P, H, R, yes...played comma if I may put it so boldly comma like a woman in love stop.

He does not notice FLORENCE walking by alone, carrying her violin case.

As he dictates, she goes along the red carpet, through the double swing doors and disappears into the darkness of the street.

SLOW FADE TO:

114   EXT. CAMDEN TOWN. DAY

115   INT. ED’S RECORDS. DAY
1982. Edward, short-haired, greying at the temples, is at the counter of his record store, checking an inventory. His store specialises in jazz and blues LPs.

A CUSTOMER leaves. Another comes in. She is CHLOE, eleven years old. EDWARD has not yet looked up.

She is solemn, poised, straight-backed. A strong-boned face, an Alice Band, school uniform. She’s carrying a violin in its case. She gazes about the store with calm self-possession.

As CHLOE goes to a rack of LPs, EDWARD glances up, then down at his figures, and up again in a slow double-take.

We watch her from his POV. She rests the violin case carefully on the floor between her feet and begins to thumb through the LPs.

EDWARD’S curiosity is growing. Finally, kindly –

EDWARD
Camden School for Girls?
CHLOE
Yes.

EDWARD
Good school?

She turns to look at him. Her gaze is level. A coincidence surely, but this is a face that reminds him of the FLORENCE he once knew, twenty years ago.

CHLOE
I think it’s very good.

EDWARD steps down from the counter.

EDWARD
Perhaps I can help you. What is it you’re looking for?

CHLOE
The thing is, it’s my mum’s birthday soon...

EDWARD
Yes...

CHLOE
She’s pretty old. She’s going to be forty two.

On EDWARD as he takes this in.

EDWARD
Same as me.

CHLOE
You see, she mostly listens to classical music and I thought I’d get her something different.

EDWARD
Does she play the violin too?

CHLOE
She’s really good. Actually, she’s quite famous. She taught me. We can play the Bach Double, the slow movement anyway.
EDWARD
So... what can you get her? How
about... let me think now... what
about this one, Chuck Berry?

CHLOE
Oh yes! She actually likes him! She
always says he’s...

EDWARD
Bouncy?

CHLOE
Yes! And...

CHLOE AND EDWARD
Merry...

CHLOE
How did you know that?

EDWARD covers fast.

EDWARD
It’s what I always say. It’s what
everyone says.

CHLOE
Well bouncy and merry is what my mum
is.

EDWARD
Is she really? Does she...

CHLOE
And this is perfect. She’ll be so
surprised! But how much is it? I’ve
only got seventy five p.

EDWARD
You can have it. I’ve got half a dozen
copies.

CHLOE
Are you really sure?

EDWARD
Positive.
CHLOE
Amazing. And thank you! I’ll put my money in your charity thing...

EDWARD
No need, honestly...

But before he can stop her she has posted her coins into the ‘Help Brain Damage Research’ collection box.

CHLOE
I can’t believe it. Are you sure you mean it? It looks bran new. Like it’s never been played before.

EDWARD
Just tell her, you know, happy birthday...

Chloe is at the door, ready to leave.

CHLOE
But happy birthday from who?

EDWARD
Oh, from... tell her, just, you know, from the shop.

CHLOE
‘Bye then. And thanks again. You’re really nice!

EDWARD
Wait. You haven’t told me your name.

CHLOE
Chloe.

A little wry smile, a wave by way of a clasped and unclasped hand, and she’s gone.

EDWARD stands alone in the centre of his empty shop, stricken.

SLOW FADE TO
High summer. 2007. A LONG SHOT over the beech woods. We find the distant green patch of the cricket pitch, and a game in progress, and the distant white figures of the PLAYERS.

Closer. PLAYERS and their FAMILIES, FRIENDS, watch the village game from around the pavilion. Two TEENAGED BOYS arguing inside the scoring box. CHILDREN playing on the grass. Some KIDS watch a movie on a hand-held device. Modern cars parked in the shade. Much is unchanged, but we are clearly in another era.

We see the game from the boundary. The BOWLER makes his run, delivers. The BATSMAN swings and misses, the stumps go flying. A chorus of ‘howzat!’

To scattered, feeble applause, the BATSMEN trudges towards us. As he comes closer, we see that it is EDWARD.

In the scoring box, the ‘last man’ score turns to zero.

EDWARD stops by the pavilion, stoops to remove his pads. It’s an effort – he’s getting rather stout. WELL-WISHERS call out, ‘Bad luck, Eddie’, ‘Good try, old man.’

EDWARD straightens.

EDWARD
Didn’t even see it. Too damn slow...

A couple of hours later. EDWARD, still in whites, a jacket slung over his shoulder, walks towards the cottage, along the avenue of limes where he walked with FLORENCE (Sc 59).

Parked outside is a small modern car. EDWARD goes up the garden path, enters. The door closes behind him.
An hour later. The place is far less cluttered than before. Not much modernised. The untidiness is of a man living alone. But the interior of the cottage is instantly recognizable. The furniture is unchanged. Along one wall, a large cd collection. There are some records scattered along a shelf above the hi-fi.

Edward’s cricket shoes are on the floor along with a half finished cup of tea. He is stretched out on the sofa, snoozing. A cat is asleep on his stomach.

A newspaper has slid to the floor. We see part of a headline over an article EDWARD has been reading. ‘Ennismore Quartet forty fifth anniversary triumph’

The following morning. EDWARD kneels to feed the cat, talks to it. We have the impression this is an important relationship.

EDWARD cuts some flowers to make a small posey.

Carrying the flowers, EDWARD makes his way along a footpath deep in the woods. He pauses briefly at a fork in the path.

VOICE OVER
Sometimes, when he thought of her, he wondered if this was the path she took when she walked to the cricket ground all those years ago...

EDWARD walks on.

VOICE OVER (CONT’D)
It rather amazed him, that he had let that girl with her violin go. Finally he could admit it, he had never met anyone he loved as much, never found anyone who matched her seriousness. (MORE)
If he’d stayed with her, perhaps he would have written those history books...

Minutes later. EDWARD puts the flowers by the graves of his parents, Marjorie Mayhew (1918 - 1976) and Lionel Mayhew (1916 - 1983).

Her strange proposal was irrelevant. All she needed was the certainty of his love, his reassurance that there was no hurry, not when a lifetime lay ahead of them...

EDWARD comes up the churchyard path, steps through the gate under the yew.

On the verge beneath the wall, by the place where FLORENCE stopped to look at her map and eat her orange, he sees some peel scattered on the grass.

Love and patience would surely have seen them through.

EDWARD looks round and sees two HIKERS walking away, sharing an orange as they go.

He heads for home across an open grassy field towards the woods.

And then what unborn children might have had their chances, what young girl with an Alice band might have become his daughter, his loved familiar?

SLOW FADE TO:

July 1962. Chesil Beach in summer calm and evening glory.
We find the couple.

FLORENCE comes away from the washed-up tree and approaches EDWARD.

    FLORENCE
    I am sorry, Edward. I am most terribly sorry...

She waits for him to respond, to forgive her.

His face is a mask of cold anger.

He remains silent.

She turns and begins to walk away from him.

    VOICE OVER
    On Chesil Beach he could have called out to Florence...

Very slowly we begin to pull away and above the couple, watching the gap between them grow.

FADE in the Rachmaninov

    VOICE OVER (CONT’D)
    She thought she had lost him, and she had never loved him more. The sound of his voice would have been a deliverance. He could have gone after her...

Now we are only on FLORENCE as she moves away from us, receding, receding...

    VOICE OVER (CONT’D)
    This is how the entire course of a life can be changed - by doing nothing.

The long road of shingle stretching to the horizon, the distant figure of FLORENCE dissolving into the dusk.

ENDS

CREDITS