

FIRST DROP OF RAIN

Written by

James P Brosnahan

Copyright (c) 2020

WGA #2080815

jimbrosnahan@gmail.com

FADE IN:

EXT. PARK - BANK OF POND - DAY

FRANCES BURNEY (early 20s), a passionate and insightful young woman, sits on a bench along with HUGH LOWE (late 20s), her handsome correspondence tutor. Frances reads the last page of a novel while Hugh listens with rapt attention.

SUPER: "London. Spring of 1776. Based on a true story."

Frances hands the book to Hugh.

INSERT - BOOK COVER

"Pamela: Or, Virtue Rewarded - by - Samuel Richardson"

BACK TO SCENE

Hugh tucks the book into his messenger bag.

HUGH

Well, Fanny, what is the verdict?

FRANCES

Oh, Hugh, is it not enough that I enjoy the books you bring me?

HUGH

I am your tutor. Thus, I am compelled to inquire. And, as my pupil, you are obliged to answer.

FRANCES

Very well. Mr. Richardson's epistolary style is effective.

HUGH

Hesitant praise.

FRANCES

He presents Pamela as an autonomous person and not an appendage to father or husband. And, she works for her living. For that, I applaud him. However, women are too deep a profundity to be compassed by a naive protagonist who views her chastity as a priceless possession to be guarded by all means necessary.

EXT. PARK - ROSE GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Frances and Hugh stroll the garden path.

HUGH

Women find Pamela to be a heroine for rebelling against her abusive master.

FRANCES

Sadly, Pamela does surrender her person to him when she becomes his obedient wife. - I would never willingly kiss a man who did not first seek my permission. And, I certainly would not marry a so-called gentleman whose concept of courting involved unwelcomed advances to the extreme of assault.

Frances and Hugh are in sight of a shelter house when the first few drops of rain gently fall.

FRANCES (cont'd)

Chastity is not a woman's highest currency. I fear; what is to become of young women if all they have to read are novels such as *Pamela*.

Hugh reaches to check a rosebush. Frances smiles playfully.

FRANCES (cont'd)

I have left no letter to be found.

HUGH

I like our little game.

FRANCES

It is as if I have an admirer.

HUGH

I admire you.

FRANCES

You must. You are my tutor.

Drizzle becomes a steady rain.

Frances races Hugh to the shelter house!

INT. SHELTER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Hugh makes it inside the shelter house a few steps ahead of Frances. They are both in laughter.

FRANCES
You never let me win.

HUGH
Would you respect me if I did?

Frances shakes her head.

They watch the rain from the safety of the shelter house.

FRANCES
Mother used to read novels to me on rainy days. I miss her.

Hugh gives her a sympathetic nod.

Distant THUNDER! The rain comes down harder.

FRANCES (cont'd)
I fear we are to miss today's lesson.

They sit at a table.

FRANCES (cont'd)
How do you expect me to practice my letters with neither ink nor quill?

HUGH
I have something to show you.

Hugh produces blank sheets of paper from his messenger bag and slides them in front of Frances.

FRANCES
I am quite familiar with paper.

Hugh produces a fountain pen from the bag.

FRANCES (cont'd)
What is it?

Hugh demonstrates the pen.

HUGH
A fountain pen. Recently arrived from Germany.

FRANCES
Will wonders never cease.

HUGH
Now that my father put me in charge
of the family publishing business, I
plan to gift one to all my authors.

Frances looks with fascination at the fountain pen.

FRANCES
May I?

Hugh playfully presents the fountain pen to Frances.

HUGH
Just this once. These are meant for
accomplished authors - not
correspondence pupils.

Frances raises an eyebrow.

EXT. HILL'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY - LATER

The rain has stopped and this street in the Strand is busy
with shoppers. Frances and Hugh admire the fine books on
display in the window.

Frances' gaze tracks from book to book, every one of them is
credited to a male author. Frances frowns. Her eyes land on
a title of interest to her.

INSERT - BOOK IN WINDOW

"Clarissa: Or, the History of a Young Lady - By - Samuel
Richardson"

BACK TO SCENE

Frances turns to find Hugh smiling at her.

Hugh holds open the door for Frances.

INT. HILL'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Men and Women peruse titles on display.

LIBRARY MAN (adult) makes himself useful with some work
behind the counter.

Frances and Hugh step up to the counter.

LIBRARY MAN
May I assist you, sir.

Hugh playfully indicates a smiling Frances. Library Man is deadpan as he shifts his eyes to her.

FRANCES
Clarissa, if you please.

EXT. HILL'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

Hugh and Frances emerge from the store. Frances clutches the book as if it is her most precious possession.

FRANCES
I shall give this a fair appraisal.

HUGH
Your father must never become wise
that I procure books for you.

FRANCES
It will remain our precious secret.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY (MORNING)

This once luxurious upper-class residence is now showing signs of neglect. Formerly a bedroom, this room is now outfitted for seamstress work. The drapes are drawn closed, shutting out the sun. The candlelight is more suggestive of midnight than morning.

Frances is hunched over *Clarissa*, which she has been secretly reading all night.

A rather untidy sewing table cluttered with table linens much in need of mending, as well as a dress form with an evening gown in the early stages of making, are evidence that Frances is far behind in her sewing.

Frances reads to the end and sets the book upon the desk. She goes to the sewing table and threads a needle. She returns to the desk, inks a quill, and pens the opening of a letter in perfect Italian 'ladies' hand' handwriting, which is much narrower and more slanted than modern cursive.

INSERT - LETTER

"Dearest, Hugh"

BACK TO SCENE

Frances goes to the window and draws open the drapes. It's dawn. She gasps!

FOOTSTEPS of a man coming up the stairs!

Frances scurries to hide *Clarissa* in a locked desk drawer. She runs to the dress form, where she pins the evening gown as if she had been hard at work sewing all night.

CHARLES BURNEY (50s), Frances' father, knocks and opens the door. His demeanor screams disappointment.

FRANCES

Picture it with ruffles and lace.

Charles shifts his gaze to the tattered tablecloth.

CHARLES

Mrs. Stokes expects her linens to be mended in time for her niece's birthday. She agreed to pay handsomely if you were to deliver them this very afternoon.

FRANCES

Must I? It is such a lovely day.

CHARLES

The path to idleness is known to lead many far off the King's highway.

FRANCES

I have toiled all night.

Charles notices the letter, inkwell and quill on the desk surrounded by burnt candles.

CHARLES

Sewing?

Frances nods her head.

Charles makes his way to the desk.

CHARLES (cont'd)

If that is true, then how is it that the candles are here - yet, you are sewing over there?

FRANCES

I... took a break to compose a letter to Hugh. Only for a moment.

Charles picks up the letter.

FRANCES (cont'd)
Personal correspondence. I trust you
will respect my privacy, Father.

Charles shakes his head in disappointment.

FRANCES (cont'd)
Do you find it unreasonable for a
pupil and her tutor to share
intimacies?

CHARLES
I desire the best for you.

Charles returns the letter to the desk.

FRANCES
Now that Mother is gone, Hugh is
the only one who understands me.

Charles processes her painful words.

CHARLES
I do not wish for you the hard life
of a woman of labor. It is important
to me that you marry well.

FRANCES
For a daughter not to burden her
father, must she burden a husband?

Charles lets out a sigh of exasperation.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Frances follows Charles down the stairs.

FRANCES
I intend to earn a good living.

CHARLES
Some work beyond sewing, perhaps?

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

FRANCES
I am fond of writing.

CHARLES

You are a good girl, my dear, and I am indebted to you for your admirable copying of my notes for my book. Do not let the idea take hold of you that such work is well paid.

FRANCES

I was not thinking of copying. Perhaps, I could write a novel.

CHARLES

To be sure - to be sure. You might write a novel for your private collection. So might anyone who could pay for a ream of paper, a bottle of ink and a box of quills.

FRANCES

I like how I feel when I write. My quill takes me away to a place where I do not miss Mother so much.

CHARLES

My dear, writing a book requires far more than female feelings. It demands male intellect.

Frances is crestfallen.

Charles retrieves hat and coat from the hall tree.

CHARLES (cont'd)

I trust that my new book will find the shelves of many readers. In the meantime, you must earn enough as a dressmaker to maintain appearances. Attracting a proper husband is an expensive proposition.

FRANCES

There is more to life than a husband.

CHARLES

You are no longer a girl. Every year counts in reducing one's chances of being settled in life. Pray tell, what can be more important than a husband?

FRANCES

Personal accomplishment. I remember how proud you were when you first beheld your *History of Medieval Music* in cover and binding. All of London flocked to your fame.

CHARLES

It seems like a lifetime has passed since the King was last desirous of inviting me to dinner at Windsor.

FRANCES

I desire to one day feel truly proud of myself, if only for a moment.

Charles dons coat and hat.

CHARLES

You have plenty of reasons to be proud. Many fine ladies have complimented your dressmaking.

Frances sighs in frustration.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Tomorrow night, we are going to see *La Buona Figliuola*. I am doing research for my book. Afterwards, you will attend your first formal ball, where I suspect you will find many eligible suitors.

Frances purses her lips.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Your sister married a singer and she lives in the lap of luxury.

Charles takes a long, hard look at Frances. This makes her suddenly self-conscious.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Your hair is a rat's nest.

Frances runs her hands through her hair.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Always be prepared to make a good first impression, lest it be your last.

FRANCES

Mother used to say that a real gentleman understands that the true worth of a woman is sealed within her pages. He is a pretentious cad who makes the mistake that he fancies all there is to know about a woman by glancing at her cover.

CHARLES

Your beauty, my dear, is how you will win a man's heart.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances stands in front of a full-length mirror as she runs a comb through her hair. The comb gets tangled and pulls. She musses her hair in frustration!

Frances goes to the desk and continues writing the letter to Hugh that she started earlier.

INSERT - LETTER

"Dearest Hugh, I am grateful for your gift of *Clarissa*."

BACK TO SCENE

Frances finishes writing the letter and seals it in wax.

EXT. PARK - ROSE GARDEN - LATER

Frances strolls down a path to the rosebush. Seeing that she is alone, she hides the letter deep within the rosebush as to not be easily discovered by the casual passerby.

SERIES OF SHOTS -- Frances tends to her seamstress duties.

A) Frances mends linens.

B) Frances leaves the house to deliver the mended linens.

C) Frances returns to the house. She is laden with a fresh pile of torn and tattered linens.

D) Frances sews evening gown by candlelight.

E) Frances falls fast asleep while dawn breaks outside the window. The completed evening gown adorns the dress form.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - DAY (AFTERNOON)

HANNAH PEARCE (late 20s), the accomplished married daughter of the Burney family, plays piano. Frances and Charles listen with rapt attention. The private concert comes to an end and Frances and Charles applaud.

CHARLES

(to Frances)

Your sister is a wonderful pianist.

(to Hannah)

Hannah, please express my gratitude to Bernard for allowing his wife to visit her broken down father.

Frances can see in her father's eyes the pride he has for her older sister. Frances rises from her chair.

FRANCES

I must attend to my mending. Thank you, Hannah. Delightful, as always.

Frances walks out.

CHARLES

Poor Frances has none of your advantages.

HANNAH

She really is not a dunce, you know.

CHARLES

I must admit, despite her lack of musical ability, she really has done some very pretty sewing.

Hannah rolls her eyes at Charles.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Hannah toys with the contents of Frances' sewing basket while Frances sews.

HANNAH

You work very neatly. More neatly than I.

Frances smiles her thanks for the compliment.

HANNAH (cont'd)

How is your writing progressing?

FRANCES

I have given my full attention to my sewing.

Hannah examines cutouts that will eventually form a dress.

HANNAH

How is it that you can make such elaborate dresses?

FRANCES

It is not too difficult, really. I see the dress in my mind, break it down into sections, cut out the pieces and sew them together.

HANNAH

I believe you will find that same creative process is important to a writer.

FRANCES

I have a great deal of work. May we converse later?

HANNAH

I remember the day you made a pretty bonfire of your novel.

FRANCES

I was worried Father would discover it.

HANNAH

I rescued a few pages from the fireplace. I still read them from time to time, wishing I had your talent for writing.

Frances looks up from her sewing for an instant and then furiously gives her attention to her sewing work.

HANNAH (cont'd)

Listen to your older sister. What you should toss into the fire is the sense of guilt you attach to the writing of stories. If you apply yourself to your craft, I have no doubt you could become one of the best novelists in all of London.

Frances becomes a little fidgety with needle and thread.

HANNAH (cont'd)
Father believes that nothing a woman
could do would surprise him.

Hannah steps to the door.

HANNAH (cont'd)
I play piano. That is my gift. You
have been blessed with the gift of
storytelling. Put it to good use. I
can see you accomplishing something
truly extraordinary.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - LATER (EVENING)

THOMAS LOWE (60s), Hugh's father and the proprietor of Lowe
and Son Publishers, is seated at his desk.

MRS. EVANS (40s), attired in a dress suitable for the wife
of a Member of Parliament, scowls at Thomas.

THOMAS
Mrs. Evans, the quality of your
manuscript is - ah - quite unlike
anything in our catalog.

Mrs. Evans glances at her manuscript on his desk. It sits
on top of a stack of other rejections.

MRS. EVANS
Then, why not publish it?

THOMAS
We are a respectable publisher. We
must adhere to our principles.

MRS. EVANS
I see. You are punishing me for being
a literary lady.

Thomas and Mrs. Evans in a stare down. Neither blinks.

MRS. EVANS (cont'd)
May I have my manuscript - please?

Thomas retrieves her manuscript and hands it over.

Mrs. Evans storms out of the office.

Thomas sighs relief. He catches a glimpse of Hugh passing by
in the hall outside the open door. Hugh is dressed in daily
business attire and carries a messenger bag.

THOMAS

Son!

Hugh stands in the doorway.

HUGH

Yes, Father?

THOMAS

Where are you off to at this hour?

HUGH

I have been summoned by Mr. Burney. It is rumored he is writing a history of opera.

Hugh pats his messenger bag.

HUGH (cont'd)

I have a contract ready for him to sign, just in case. - Who was that lady? She appeared rather put out.

THOMAS

Mrs. Evans. Wife to a Member of Parliament. She considers herself something of a novelist.

HUGH

Is her book any good?

THOMAS

Scandalous story in the style of Haywood's *Love in Excess*. Entirely inappropriate for our respectable clientele.

HUGH

You reject all literary ladies. Why?

THOMAS

They are all scandalous women with stories to match. Richardson would never imagine a female character so bold as to think like a man.

HUGH

What if a female writer were to craft a story where the protagonist thinks and acts like a real woman - would you consider it?

THOMAS

Lowe and Son will never publish a literary lady!

EXT. PARK - ROSE GARDEN - LATER (EVENING)

Hugh casually strolls down the path to the rosebush. Seeing that he is alone, he stealthily retrieves Frances' hidden letter. He reads it.

FRANCES (V.O.)

(as Hugh reads...)

Dearest Hugh, I am grateful for your gift of *Clarissa*. As an interpreter of women, Mr. Richardson has sorely missed the mark yet again. To be fair, I am unworthy to pronounce judgment. Lacking any experience of romance, my narrative of men would be found equally wanting. I cherish you for bringing me books. You are my trusted tutor. Sincerely, Fanny.

Hugh places the letter in his messenger bag.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - LATER (EVENING)

Charles, in formal attire, swirls a glass of Madeira wine as he lounges on the sofa. Hugh sits up straight in a nearby chair. In his hand is a glass of Madeira.

HUGH

You certainly know how to make one feel under dressed.

CHARLES

I wish to speak with you on a matter of some gravity.

HUGH

Father and I are hopeful this matter has to do with Lowe and Son's representation of your new book.

CHARLES

I hold your father in high esteem. He has grown Lowe Publishers from humble beginnings into the most respected publishing house in London.

HUGH

You mean, *Lowe and Son Publishers*.

CHARLES

Thomas sells my book to respected professors. You tutor my daughter in the womanly art of correspondence.

Charles swirls his wine and raises the glass to his nose.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Hint of orange peel and burnt sugar.

Charles sips and lets the wine linger on the tongue.

HUGH

Shall we discuss your book?

Charles glances towards the stairs as if he expects someone to descend at any moment.

CHARLES

Among other things.

HUGH

To what other purpose have I done myself the honor of this visit?

CHARLES

You were a Navy man.

HUGH

I served my King, yes.

CHARLES

Then, you have been among the savages of the South Seas, and are acquainted with the rules of chasing and capturing prizes - all of the feminine gender.

HUGH

Do you mean frigates and catamarans?

CHARLES

There is nothing nearer feminine in form than a catamaran.

HUGH

What does this have to do with your book? You are writing on the subject of opera, not of ships and seas.

CHARLES

I venture to say you see my daughter
as something of a prize.

Hugh's look of astonishment is met with Charles' stern gaze.

CHARLES (cont'd)

Do not be under any illusion that I
am not wise. Nothing happens in this
house without my knowing it.

Hugh reaches into his messenger bag to retrieve the
publishing contract, but unwittingly ends up with the letter
from Frances in his hand. The wax seal makes it evident,
however, he fails to notice. Charles immediately recognizes
his daughter's wax seal, and he smirks.

HUGH

I have here a contract, sir.

CHARLES

I understand you and Frances exchange
personal letters.

Hugh follows Charles' stern gaze to the letter and catches
his mistake.

HUGH

That she may practice her
correspondence, yes.

Hugh stuffs the letter into his messenger bag and retrieves
the contract.

CHARLES

No more personal letters. I wish for
Frances a husband who can provide her
the lavish life she richly deserves.

Hugh is dumbfounded as he holds the contract in his unsteady
hand. Charles looks at Hugh sternly.

Frances, breathtaking in her evening gown, appears standing
in the passageway. She is shocked at the unexpected presence
of Hugh!

FRANCES

Hugh!

Hugh is fast to his feet! He is rendered witless by Frances'
stunning beauty.

HUGH

Fanny!

Charles raises an eyebrow.

Hugh bows.

HUGH (cont'd)

You are stunning.

Frances curtsies.

FRANCES

You are too kind, sir.

Frances glares at Charles. He retorts with a cheeky grin and a shrug.

CHARLES

(to Hugh)

How careless of me to get my days confused. Tonight, is my daughter's introduction into society. Quite the formal affair. Many of London's most eligible bachelors will be there.

Hugh gazes at Frances. This makes her self-conscious.

HUGH

I have never seen you so elegant.

FRANCES

No one will notice me.

HUGH

London will adore you.

Charles extends his arm. Frances accepts.

CHARLES

(to Hugh)

You may see yourself out. Leave your contract on the table.

(to Frances)

Shall we?

Charles escorts Frances out of the room.

Main door to the house CREAKS OPEN and SLAMS CLOSED.

Hugh sets the contract on the table.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - LATER

Chamber orchestra plays and couples waltz.

MILES HAZELTON (early 30s), one of London's most famous tenors and an eligible bachelor, holds court with many fashionable ladies.

Frances hangs onto Charles' arm. Charles slides his arm out from Frances' grasp.

FRANCES

Do not leave me.

CHARLES

My dear, you cannot experience life sitting in a corner.

Charles winks and makes his exit.

Frances gingerly steps into the room.

MUSIC ends.

APPLAUSE from all, except Frances who observes for a second, not knowing what to do. A moment passes. Frances applauds with great enthusiasm just as the applause in the room dies down, placing herself as the center of attention. Dance couples are put off by her display of classlessness.

Frances notices that she has established herself as a curiosity.

Miles cannot take his eyes off her.

Frances tries and fails to feign a self-confident posture. As she looks for a friendly face, her eyes land on Miles. Intimidated by him, she retreats into the corner.

Miles approaches and they stand face to face.

Miles smiles. Her beauty has rendered him breathless.

Frances flushes, her eyes cast downward.

FRANCES

I would rather that you talk to me than merely look at me.

MILES

Yours is a face that deserves to be admired.

FRANCES

I do not invite people to look at me,
and happily few people do.

The next waltz begins to play.

MILES

Will you honor me with a dance?

FRANCES

I would rather not be considered
ready to accept the first partner who
would take me.

MILES

Please allow me to properly introduce
myself. I am Miles Hazelton.

Frances is starstruck.

FRANCES

The opera tenor?

Miles bows.

MILES

At your service.

Miles waits for Frances to introduce herself, but all she
can do is gaze at him.

MILES (cont'd)

And, you are?

FRANCES

Frances. Frances Burney.

Miles offers to take her hand.

MILES

Miss Burney, allow me the honor and
happiness of this dance.

Frances extends her hand at first, then draws it back.

MILES (cont'd)

It is perfectly natural.

FRANCES

I am sure it is. I just have never
seen nature so formally attired.

Miles gallantly extends his hand and waits patiently.

Frances summons courage and takes his hand.

Miles leads Frances out onto the dance floor.

Dancing couples sneak peeks at Frances. She is a new face dancing with the famous tenor. Frances catches their glances and is suddenly even more self-conscious. Miles can see what is going on and he soaks in the attention.

MILES

Let them look. They are all envious
that I have such a lovely partner.

Frances smiles. She struggles to maintain a proper dance posture. Her inexperience at a formal dance is heightened by nervousness.

FRANCES

I must be an embarrassment.

MILES

Your part is easy. All you need to do
is follow my lead.

Miles does his best to lead Frances, however, her feet get in his way and they nearly topple with Miles catching her.

MUSIC stops and the room goes silent!

FRANCES

I feel like a fart in a hurricane.

Miles is on the verge of laughter, yet maintains composure.

Dance couples stare at Frances and Miles.

FRANCES (cont'd)

Sorry.

MUSIC as the next song plays.

Miles and Frances dance. Frances is deliberate about her footwork, which results in mechanical movement.

Miles attempts to pull Frances in closer to him. She responds by maintaining a respectable distance.

MILES

Being in the public eye, I could
never get away with such crude
language. *A fart in a hurricane.* Ha!
Women are the fortunate ones.

FRANCES

How so?

MILES

You enjoy the fruit of a gentleman's talents without expenditure of effort nor fear of consequence.

Frances glares at him.

MILES (cont'd)

You must admit that men are burdened with high expectations while ladies are granted allowances for their failures.

FRANCES

Might I suggest we find a more suitable subject of conversation?

MILES

Take this dance, for example. Your right foot is unfamiliar with your left, yet I will be the one ridiculed for being an inadequate lead.

Frances pulls away from Miles, which startles him.

FRANCES

I am sorry that you have been so unfortunate as to make choice of me for a partner.

Frances turns away, drawing unwanted attention for Miles.

MILES

What accident of mine may I attribute to your poor behavior?

Frances meets Miles eye to eye.

FRANCES

Accident, sir?

MILES

Yes, accident; for surely it is not my intention to tempt a lady to be guilty of ill-manners.

FRANCES

I would like to go now. London has just grown tiresome.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - LOBBY - CONTINUOUS

Charles observes Frances storming in from the ballroom.

Frances makes her way to the exit and, realizing that she is without her father, comes to a stop. She waits in dignified fashion as Charles approaches. He extends his arm. She accepts. He escorts her to the door.

FRANCES

I should have stayed in the corner.

CHARLES

I see. What is the gentleman's name?

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY (NEXT MORNING)

Frances sews, glancing at the desk while she works. She sets aside the sewing needle. She retrieves a hidden key from underneath a candle and unlocks a desk drawer, retrieving the novel *Clarissa*. She gazes at it for a moment. Frances sets the book aside and settles in at the desk. She inks her quill and begins to write.

FRANCES (V.O.)

(as she writes...)

To draw characters from nature and to mark the manners of the times, is the attempted plan of the following letters. - Evelina to the Rev. Mr. Villars.

Frances blankly stares at the paper. She glances at the evening gown on the dress form. She smiles and writes.

FRANCES (V.O.) (cont'd)

(as she writes...)

A private ball this was called, so I expected to have seen about four or five couples; but Lord! I believe I saw half the world! The gentlemen looked as if they thought I was quite at their disposal. I thought it so provoking, that I determined I would rather not dance at all, than with anyone who would seem to think me ready to accept the first partner who would condescend to take me. Everything is so new to me. But it is now time to conclude. I am, with all love and duty, your Evelina.

Frances smiles as she admires her first page.

Charles appears standing in the doorway.

CHARLES

More letters?

Frances glances at the top of the page.

INSERT - TOP OF PAGE

"Evelina to the Rev. Mr. Villars."

BACK TO SCENE

FRANCES

Yes, Father. I am writing letters.

Charles eyes are drawn to the book *Clarissa* on the desk. He shakes his head and walks away.

EXT. PARK - TEA GARDEN - DAY

Fashionable ladies mingle and enjoy tea.

Frances and Hannah sip tea and eat cakes at a table.

FRANCES

Miles believes himself to be the belle of the ball, but I shall teach him that a woman can be just as important as a man.

HANNAH

I am somewhat acquainted with Mr. Hazelton. He has performed in more than one opera with my husband. I am certain he was quite taken with you.

FRANCES

My heart raced when he asked me to dance. Is this what love feels like?

HANNAH

Careful now. What one considers love is often a veiled infatuation.

FRANCES

He chose me! So many distinguished ladies - and he danced with me - a nobody - a seamstress.

HANNAH

There are seamstresses that do more
for this world than ladies of rank.

FRANCES

I must lift myself up from my level
of insignificance. I will never play
the part of a crowned beggar maid.

HANNAH

Is that how you think of yourself - a
beggar maid?

A flurry of activity as ladies flock to greet Miles, who is
on a stroll through the park! Frances does not notice, but
Hannah does.

FRANCES

Miles is exceedingly handsome.

HANNAH

Not to mention fashionably dressed.

Hannah motions for Frances to turn around. The sight of
Miles catches Frances by surprise!

Ladies press around Miles and speak at him in a buzz of
voices. He bows low to the ladies and smiles politely.

Miles catches a glimpse of Frances and his smile broadens.
He comes to her side. It is only then that he notices
Hannah. He tips his hat and bows.

MILES

Miss Burney. - Mrs. Pearce.

Frances is speechless.

HANNAH

Fine weather we are having.

MILES

I regret I am expected at rehearsal.
Otherwise, I would join you.

Miles presents a pair of theater tickets to Frances.

MILES (cont'd)

You will be my honored guest on
opening night.

Frances remains speechless as she accepts the tickets.

MILES (cont'd)
Consider this an apology for my rude
behavior at the ball. - Enjoy your
tea, ladies.

Frances watches Miles walk away.

HANNAH
Tell me about this rude behavior.

FRANCES
We exchanged a few words in haste.

HANNAH
I would never wish for you the hard
fate of having a singer at your side.

FRANCES
And yet, you married one.

HANNAH
That is what makes me an authority.
Mother is no longer with us, so it is
my responsibility, as your older
sister, to provide an opinion on this
matter.

FRANCES
I am listening.

HANNAH
Men are like those books you read.
Mr. Hazelton does pose an impressive
binding and cover. I grant him that.
However, I advise you to read this
book word for word, lest you make a
rash judgment before you reach the
final chapter. Do you understand what
I am saying?

FRANCES
Completely. You are saying that a man
such as Miles is beyond my reach.

HANNAH
Listen to me. I know a thing or two
about men like Mr. Hazelton. Did he
seek to learn about you?

FRANCES
I did not provide him an opportunity.

HANNAH

Be wary of a man who is smitten with himself. That has been my experience with singers.

FRANCES

My only sister considers me unworthy of a gentleman's affections.

Hannah chuckles and shakes her head in frustration.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Frances sits at the desk. The book *Clarissa* is nowhere to be seen. She pens the last line of a new chapter. She takes the page to the window and reads.

FRANCES

(Reading...)

I have since been extremely angry with myself for neglecting so excellent an opportunity of apologizing for my behavior at the dance. But, if ever we should happen to be so situated again, I will certainly mention it; for I am inexpressibly concerned at the thought of his harboring an opinion that I am bold or impertinent, and I could almost kill myself for having given him the shadow of a reason for so shocking an idea.

KNOCK at the door.

FRANCES (cont'd)

You may enter.

Charles cracks the door and pokes his head in.

Frances glances at the empty space on the desk once occupied by *Clarissa*. Charles has a mischievous look about him.

FRANCES (cont'd)

Have you seen my copy of...?

Frances thinks twice and cuts herself off.

CHARLES

(feigns confusion)

Copy of what, dear?

FRANCES
Never mind it.

CHARLES
Hugh is expected today.

FRANCES
How soon?

CLIP CLOP of a horse drawn carriage is heard.

CHARLES
Presently, it would appear. It seems
as if the man has an annoying
penchant for unannounced visits.

Charles closes the door behind him.

Frances looks in the mirror and confirms that she is not
quite put together for receiving guests.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Charles serves Hugh a drink.

CHARLES
I summoned you because I have
important business to discuss.

HUGH
I am your servant, sir. I trust that
this time you refer to our contract.

CHARLES
When your father published my first
book, there was no contract beyond a
handshake between two honorable men.

Frances appears standing in the passageway and waits to be
acknowledged.

HUGH
These are modern times, sir. Much has
changed.

CHARLES
Change is a double-bladed sword.
With every swing, we slay the worst,
and the best, of our traditions.

HUGH
I trust you perused the contract.

Frances clears her throat to draw attention.

Hugh is fast to his feet!

HUGH (cont'd)
Fanny!

Hugh bows. Frances curtsies. Charles smirks.

HUGH (cont'd)
Please, join us.

FRANCES
Are you quite sure? The conversation impressed upon me that you are conducting business.

HUGH
I insist.

Frances takes a seat, followed by Hugh.

Charles reaches into his vest pocket for the contract and comes up empty.

CHARLES
How careless of me. I must have left the contract sitting on my desk. If you will excuse me.

Charles is at the passageway when he turns to Hugh.

CHARLES (cont'd)
No catamarans.

Charles smirks and leaves the room.

FRANCES
Catamarans?

HUGH
Navy humor.

FRANCES
What were you discussing with Father, if you do not mind me asking?

HUGH
An agreement for me to represent his new book.

FRANCES
Oh. Did you get my letter?

HUGH
I have it right here.

Hugh reaches into his messenger bag and produces the letter.

HUGH (cont'd)
It is my belief that you could write rings around Richardson - with some knowledge of romance, as you stated so well.

Hugh hands the letter to Frances.

Charles appears standing in the passageway. He eavesdrops, unobserved by Hugh and Frances.

HUGH (cont'd)
I considered you could read it to me and expound your review of *Clarissa*.

FRANCES
You have always been sincere in your interest to learn my perspective.

HUGH
Once I finish up with your father, we can get to our lesson.

FRANCES
That would be lovely. Unfortunately, I have misplaced the book.

Hugh catches a glimpse of Charles. Charles clearly holds a book in his hands. Hugh gapes. Frances considers Hugh's expression is in response to her misplacement of the book.

FRANCES (cont'd)
I will find a way to replace it.

CHARLES
I believe Hugh was not expecting me to discover this.

Frances turns her gaze to Charles.

Charles holds up the book *Clarissa* for all the world to see!

Frances furrows her brow.

Charles raises an eyebrow at Frances and indicates the letter in her hands.

CHARLES (cont'd)

May I?

FRANCES

I find your request appalling;
however, I am not ashamed. You may
see it if you insist.

Frances surrenders the letter to Charles. He glances at it
before turning his attention to Hugh.

CHARLES

Have I not made myself perfectly
clear that my daughter is forbidden
to read novels?

FRANCES

It was all my doing, Father. I am the
one responsible for bringing
Richardson's rubbish into your house.

CHARLES

Samuel Richardson was a devout
moralist and I will not have his name
sullied in this house.

FRANCES

Consider his Pamela. He praises her
more for defending her virtue than
anything related to her abilities or
intelligence. She is an object of her
master's lust for much of the story.
That is what we get in our libraries
when men hold the quills.

Charles smiles. He is mildly amused.

CHARLES

If you are to go to all this trouble
to sneak a book into our home, I
suggest you hide it properly. Not to
mention, show some appreciation for
quality writing.

FRANCES

Of course, the issue you would take
most umbrage with is that I did not
like the forbidden book.

HUGH

Surely, you do not suggest that
Frances is lesser for reading novels?

CHARLES

It is indecent.

FRANCES

Well, I read. I even write.

CHARLES

And someday your letters will be on display at Hill's Library alongside great men of literature.

FRANCES

Would it be so terrible if I were to write a novel?

Charles laughs.

CHARLES

(to Hugh, in fun)

Look what you have done. You have disillusioned the poor girl through the reading of fiction.

FRANCES

You said yourself that I did good work on your *History of Medieval Music*.

CHARLES

Copying notes for your father's book does not make you a writer. It simply means that you are a useful daughter.

HUGH

Her correspondence is of high quality.

CHARLES

Be serious, man! I do not mean writing letters! What if Frances wrote a serious book? Would you dare publish her?

HUGH

Lowe and Son does not publish literary ladies.

Charles looks Frances straight in the eyes.

CHARLES

There you have it, my dear. If you were to write a book, it would be all for naught.

Frances is crestfallen. She rises.

FRANCES

I am not quite up for a lesson today,
Mr. Lowe. Since the chances of my
seeing you again before you take
leave is remote, I bid you goodbye.

Frances makes a graceful exit despite her dashed hopes.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances runs in and slams the door! She hides her face in
her hands to conceal her tears.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

HUGH

I fear we reduced her to hysterics.

Charles presents the book and Frances' letter to Hugh.

CHARLES

Reading causes her no end of trouble.

Hugh presents the contract to Charles. The men exchange
book and documents like they are hostages.

HUGH

I believe reading conjures up fond
memories of her mother.

CHARLES

Esther was a voracious reader.

HUGH

And you made choice of her as your
wife.

Charles raises an eyebrow.

HUGH (cont'd)

May I be so bold as to suggest that
Frances will fair equally well - not
despite her reading; because of it.

CHARLES

Frances is a grown woman now. She can
no longer afford to engage in such
unfashionable activities if she is to
reach for a higher shelf than Esther.

Charles peruses the contract.

HUGH

I trust we can come to an agreement.

CHARLES

The sum is far less than expected.

HUGH

It is a generous offer.

CHARLES

A bloody insult! That's what it is!
A fraction of what Thomas paid for my
first book.

HUGH

The history of music is no longer the
treasured subject it once was.

Hugh extends a hand.

HUGH (cont'd)

If this book sells as well as your
first, I will see to it that you are
fairly compensated.

Charles and Hugh shake hands.

CHARLES

You shall have a first draft shortly.
I am well into the early chapters.

HUGH

Perhaps, Frances could help you on
this book beyond copy work?

CHARLES

You are not a father, so I do not
expect you to understand. I must
protect Frances.

HUGH

From what, exactly?

CHARLES

Humiliation.

HUGH

Hers or yours?

Charles stares at Hugh, a quizzical look on his face.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances, quill in hand, blankly stares at an equally blank sheet of paper.

KNOCK at the door.

HUGH (O.S.)

It is I, Hugh. May I enter?

FRANCES

If you insist.

Hugh enters.

HUGH

Have I upset you?

FRANCES

The winds seem to send you in all directions. I would expect a former pilot to steer his ship on a truer course.

HUGH

I am confused.

FRANCES

You are confused? Try being taught to appreciate literature only to discover that your tutor is not supportive of *literary ladies*.

HUGH

That is not what I said.

FRANCES

Then, Father and I must be equally mistaken by your meaning.

Hugh is drawn to the blank sheets of paper on the desk. She follows his gaze.

FRANCES (cont'd)

I have been searching for how to begin the next letter.

HUGH

"Dearest, Hugh" is as good a place to start as any.

A tattered tablecloth and a promise of a dress on the sewing table catches Hugh's eye.

FRANCES

I have been ruminating on whether or not to follow the epistolary form.

Hugh is drawn to the dress.

HUGH

It appears you may be falling behind on your duties.

Frances rolls her eyes.

HUGH (cont'd)

I am concerned your father may curtail our lessons if you fail to make progress. We cannot allow that to happen.

Hugh examines the stitching on the dress.

FRANCES

What I have been trying to say is that I am struggling with how to style my writing.

HUGH

You know all too well how to style a letter.

Frances grunts in frustration!

HUGH (cont'd)

Your herringbone is impressive. How do you do it?

Frances tosses her hands in the air!

FRANCES

Fine! Let's talk sewing!

Frances sets aside her quill and takes a seat next to Hugh.

FRANCES (cont'd)

(a bit sarcastic)

Would you like me to teach you how to herringbone?

HUGH

(in perfect honesty)

Would you mind?

Frances is caught off guard. She pauses and softens her tone.

FRANCES
It would be my pleasure.

Frances takes up needle and thread.

FRANCES (cont'd)
What you know is modeled from the
common Channel herring. It is
followed with regularity by London
seamstresses.

Frances demonstrates the stitching of a herringbone pattern
on a piece of muslin.

FRANCES (cont'd)
My new pattern is modeled after the
flying-fish of the South Seas.

Hugh looks at her quizzically.

FRANCES (cont'd)
I still have all those drawings you
brought me from your sailing
adventures.

HUGH
That was years ago.

Frances smiles.

FRANCES
Notice the beautiful design of the
backbone.

Hugh examines her fine work.

HUGH
You have a steady hand.

FRANCES
Thank you.

HUGH
Let me help you with the tablecloth.
Simple mending, I can do. I would
rather it not become common knowledge
that I enjoy it so much.

FRANCES
It is a strange world, indeed, when
one must hide their talents.

HUGH

It is a hard world for men. We are expected to be one sort of way.

FRANCES

I can only imagine the strain.

HUGH

Ours is a family of boys. Someone had to learn the basics.

They laugh and mend the tablecloth.

HUGH (cont'd)

Perhaps, we could alternate lessons. I teach you literature one week and you teach me more advanced sewing techniques the next - all with the utmost discretion, of course.

Frances smiles and nods. They sew.

FRANCES

Have you ever dreamt of doing something truly meaningful?

HUGH

Fanny, I have little doubt you can make a man instantly happy while also taking the world by storm.

FRANCES

Men take the world by storm. Women are destined to dance in their puddles.

Charles steps into the room. He looks with suspicion at Hugh holding the tablecloth and sewing needle.

Hugh, suddenly self-conscious, sets the sewing work down.

Charles stares blankly at Frances and shakes his head. He leaves and shuts the door behind him.

FRANCES (cont'd)

Father is exasperating!

HUGH

He means well.

FRANCES

A father's acknowledgment that a daughter is useful is practically an announcement that she is not accomplished.

HUGH

He loves you, in his way.

FRANCES

You are now in charge of publishing, am I correct?

HUGH

Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?

FRANCES

Would Lowe and Son ever consider publishing a female author?

HUGH

My father would never stand for it.

FRANCES

I am asking you.

HUGH

I would consider it. Provided, of course, she proved herself able to write as well as the published authors in our catalog.

Frances gives Hugh a peck on the cheek!

HUGH (cont'd)

Wow! Tell your literary lady friend that it is good to dream.

FRANCES

Who are you talking about?

HUGH

You are inquiring on behalf of a literary lady, am I correct?

FRANCES

My *literary lady* friend dreams the same dream that comes to so many men who have written a book and sent it forth for the world to receive with acclaim; the dream of fame.

HUGH
A lofty dream.

FRANCES
A proper dream.

HUGH
Advise your friend that, for now, her best odds are to submit to a lesser publisher. They are more sympathetic to literary ladies. I have heard about print runs of tens of copies.

Frances purses her lips disappointingly.

FRANCES
And this is why fame will allude her.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

Couples waltz about the dance floor.

Frances walks in with Charles.

FRANCES
Miles was incredible tonight!

CHARLES
Gallery seats, however, I am not complaining. It was a sensational opening night.

FRANCES
His performance of *Waft her, Angels* was something I will not soon forget. Was there ever so angelic a man?

Miles is nowhere to be seen. Charles can read the disappointment on Frances' face.

CHARLES
It may take him some time to leave the theater, considering all those ladies gathered at the stage door.

Frances rolls her eyes at Charles.

Frances has her back to the ballroom entrance, so she does not notice the appearance of Miles.

MUSIC stops.

Crowd welcomes Miles with enthusiastic applause!

Frances twirls to observe Miles standing at the entrance. She smiles and Miles answers her with a low bow. Frances is embarrassed and quickly turns to Charles. She hides her flushed face in her gloved hands.

Charles grins and feigns a yawn.

CHARLES (cont'd)

All this excitement has taken a toll on this old man. Would you mind terribly if I call it a night? I will ask our driver to return.

Frances gives her father a peck on the cheek.

Charles bows and makes his way to the door.

Miles approaches Frances.

Charles beams with pride as he makes his way out the door.

FRANCES

What is it like to walk into a room resounding with acclamation and women ready to throw themselves at your feet?

MILES

Tiresome.

FRANCES

I have often wondered how it would feel to be admired.

MILES

You must have many admirers.

FRANCES

That is a nice consideration.

MILES

Thank you for coming to my opening night.

FRANCES

I thoroughly enjoyed it, although I am still somewhat ignorant to what it was all supposed to be about.

MILES

Here is a secret. So am I.

FRANCES

Surely, you understand the story?

MILES

I sing my part, the same words night after night, and try not to appear bored out of my mind. That is the real craft in acting.

FRANCES

Well, you are good at it.

MILES

When I approached you after the performance, you fled from me. Was that kind?

FRANCES

One who has my odious self-consciousness does not ask what is kind or unkind. She simply flies.

MILES

What did you think of my performance?

FRANCES

I am still thinking of *Waft her, Angels*, although nearly an hour must have passed since I heard you sing the last notes. It seems to me that when half a century will have passed, I shall still be thinking of it.

MILES

Then I have not sung in vain.

MUSIC resumes and couples make their way to the dance floor.

MILES (cont'd)

May I have the honor of this dance?

FRANCES

You may.

MILES

Does that mean you are not going to run away like at the theater?

FRANCES

It means, I would rather dance with you than with a stranger.

Miles leads Frances onto the dance floor.

MILES

Would you like to hear about my process as a singer?

FRANCES

Of course.

MILES

My old maestro gave me this advice when I was proving to him my success in reaching the high note, which I had been striving for years to bring into my compass. "*That is all very well,*" he said. "*You have aimed at touching that rare note. Now your aim must be to touch the heart.*"

FRANCES

Not too difficult - for you.

MILES

I did not care to touch hearts. For me, it was all in the musical challenge. That is, until my eyes beheld you. Now, I want to touch your heart with everything I sing.

His hand wanders low on her waist.

MILES (cont'd)

I know a quiet place where we can become better acquainted.

Frances takes his hand and guides it from her waist.

FRANCES

It is enough for one evening that I was wafted by the angels. You must not speak another word lest the charm of the evening should fade away.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - LATER

Frances lights candles. She retrieves the manuscript of her novel *Evelina* from the locked desk drawer.

INSERT - MANUSCRIPT TITLE PAGE

"*Evelina: Or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World - By - Anonymous*"

BACK TO SCENE

Frances writes at a productive pace.

FRANCES (V.O.)
 Evelina to the Rev. Mr. Villars. -
 Just attended my first opera. I had
 not any idea of so great a performer.
 His voice so clear, so melodious, yet
 so wonderfully various in its tones!
 Such grace in his motions! And - Such
 fire in his eyes!

A glimpse of one of her letters to Hugh gives her pause. Frances scans the letter and then the first page of her book. She places the letter next to the page of her book.

INSERT - LETTER AND FIRST PAGE

It is evident by the identical handwriting that both were written by Frances. Furthermore, the script is in 'ladies' hand' and makes it obvious that a woman wrote it.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - CHARLES' STUDY - CONTINUOUS

Frances pulls a manuscript from the shelf. She sits at her father's partner desk and sets his original handwritten manuscript in front of her.

INSERT - MANUSCRIPT COVER

"The History of Medieval Music - By - Charles Burney"

BACK TO SCENE

Frances flips to a page and studies the handwriting differences between her father's penmanship and hers.

INSERT - PAGE OF MANUSCRIPT

Charles' penmanship is in round hand: a plain, middle-size script akin to modern day cursive. Simple and easy to read, compared to the elegance and flourishes of 'ladies' hand.'

BACK TO SCENE

FLASHBACK:

YOUNG FRANCES (teens) and Charles collaborate on notes for Charles' *History of Medieval Music* manuscript. Young Frances copies a note on a page.

INSERT - PAGE OF MANUSCRIPT

Charles' handwriting is different from her hand.

BACK TO SCENE

YOUNG FRANCES

My hand is distinctive from yours.

CHARLES

I learned round hand. It is a manly form. Mr. Lowe taught you to write in Italian 'ladies' hand.' It is a simple form, thus much easier to teach to the ladies.

END FLASHBACK.

Frances, with an unsteady hand, fails at her first attempt to mimic round hand.

FOOTSTEPS as Charles comes up the stairs!

Frances scurries to clean up the desk and return her father's manuscript to the bookshelf.

SERIES OF SHOTS -- Frances learns to write in round hand.

A) Frances in her father's study where she practices round hand while growing more and more frustrated with what seems to be a lack of progress.

B) Frances copies the first page of *Evelina* and compares the original with the copy. There is a slight improvement in her round hand with a hint of 'ladies' hand.'

C) Frances copies the first page of *Evelina* in fluid round hand and is pleased with her new manly style of handwriting.

EXT. PARK - BANK OF POND - DAY

Frances and Miles stroll the bank of the pond. They appear deeply infatuated with each other. A butterfly catches Frances' attention and she bends down to get a closer look.

MILES

The bloom on the wing of a butterfly is a very tender thing. The breath of a man is sufficient to remove it. And when the bloom has gone the charm of the beautiful creature has gone also.

Frances is a little peeved.

FRANCES
Do you mean to imply that the
butterfly is beautiful, but nothing
else?

Miles laughs.

MILES
I am rebuked!

Miles and Frances come eye to eye.

MILES (cont'd)
With us, I mean the beauty of your
soul. Your life has on it the bloom
of a butterfly's wing.

Miles takes her in his arms.

MILES (cont'd)
If you wish, I will not go beyond the
rose as my emblem of you - my best
woman.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Frances and Hugh sew together.

HUGH
A summer has passed since you last
wrote me. In the meantime, I must
read for work, not pleasure.

Frances glances at inkwell and quills upon the desk.

FRANCES
I have been busy.

HUGH
So, I have not fallen into disfavor?

FRANCES
I had not realized how sincerely you
have missed reading my letters.

HUGH

I feel as if I were suddenly cut off from some great interest in life; as if I had gone to the office one morning and found that someone had stolen the printing press.

Hugh gazes into Frances' eyes.

HUGH (cont'd)

I can finish up here if you would like to sit down and compose one. I will even pretend to be surprised when I find it among the roses.

Hugh inadvertently pricks his thumb with the sewing needle!

HUGH (cont'd)

Ouch!

FRANCES

That is why God invented the thimble.

HUGH

If you tell anyone about this, so help me, I will deny it and label you the biggest liar in all of London.

Frances giggles.

HUGH (cont'd)

Does my sewing amuse you?

Frances regains composure.

FRANCES

You show much improvement.

Hugh grins and resumes mending.

FRANCES (cont'd)

My heart is not in my needlework.

HUGH

I can tell. Your cross stitch is slovenly and your straight stitch indifferent.

FRANCES

And how is it that a man can criticize my sewing?

HUGH

I have a wonderful tutor.

Charles comes knocking with roses and a card from Miles. Charles shoots Hugh a cheeky grin and walks out. Frances reads the card.

FRANCES

(reading the card...)

To Frances, my beautiful rose. Miles Hazelton.

HUGH

The tenor?

Frances grins from ear to ear and nods.

FRANCES

We met that night Father took me to the ball.

HUGH

Are you two - courting?

FRANCES

Yes, I believe we are.

Frances fawns over the roses. Hugh looks a bit thrown off-kilter, yet Frances doesn't seem to fully connect why.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - DAY

Hannah practices piano while Frances dusts the furniture.

SUPER: "Spring of 1777."

FRANCES

It is the greatest mystery of my life. Why a man who is as handsome as an archangel should so much as glance at me.

HANNAH

In the book you are writing, Lord Orville respects Evelina physically and emotionally. Is that true of Mr. Hazelton?

FRANCES

Miles sometimes forgets himself. But I know what to do.

HANNAH

It is a beautiful romance you are writing. The pages you shared are quite good.

FRANCES

Do you remember how Father made a jest of my thirst for reading by pretending to teach me the alphabet with the page turned upside down?

HANNAH

I considered him clever. He was first to recognize your early difficulty reading letters.

FRANCES

I could have sorted it out on my own.

HANNAH

I have no doubt.

FRANCES

This I learned on my own. So brilliant a person as Miles could never be happily married to so insignificant a person as myself.

HANNAH

It would be a huge misfortune if you should allow yourself to be attracted by the glamour that attaches to the appearance of such a man as Mr. Hazelton, though, mind you, I believe that he honestly fancies himself in love with you. Please be sensible.

FRANCES

I will prove to Miles that I can write as well as he can sing. Then, we will be equals.

INT. PEARCE FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - NIGHT

Miles relaxes on the sofa while Frances trims wicks and lights candles.

Miles is drawn to the piano.

MILES

I suppose you play piano?

FRANCES

I find enjoyment in writing.

Frances is fidgety as she retrieves from the mantel a short story she composed for Miles.

MILES

Good letter-writing gives innocent pleasure to family and friends. It is a ladylike accomplishment and one worth excelling in.

Frances joins Miles on the sofa. She sits a respectable distance from him, yet he slides closer. Frances presents the short story to Miles.

FRANCES

I wrote this for you.

Miles is so enamored with the piano that he fails to notice the short story.

MILES

That is a beautiful forte-piano.

FRANCES

Oh. Yes, it has provided many entertaining evenings.

Miles places his hand upon her knee.

MILES

You must have a talented musician in the family.

Frances gently slides his hand from her knee.

FRANCES

My older sister, Hannah. May I read to you what I wrote?

MILES

Only a few years ago, no one thought to improve upon the harpsichord; and yet I assert that in a short time the harpsichord will be no more than a curiosity.

FRANCES

Perhaps, you would like to take my words home with you to read later?

MILES

I am of the opinion that the piano will replace the harpsichord in every household.

Miles directs his gaze from the piano to Frances.

MILES (cont'd)

How has this come about? I am making a speech about pianos when I meant to talk to you of yourself?

FRANCES

We always seem to find a more profitable topic.

Miles responds with a cheeky grin.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - LATER

Frances writes late into the night. Her frustration grows with the daunting task of a new novelist's first draft.

FRANCES (V.O.)

(as she writes...)

The conversation with Lord Orville was delightful. His manners are so elegant, so gentle, so unassuming, that they at once engage esteem, and diffuse complacence. Far from being indolently satisfied with his own accomplishments, as I have already observed many men here are, though without any pretensions to his merit, he is most assiduously attentive to please and to serve all who are in his company.

Frances is at her wits end as she finds mistake after mistake in her manuscript. She inks the quill and writes.

FRANCES (V.O.) (cont'd)

(as she writes...)

And, though his success is invariable, he never manifests the smallest degree of consciousness.

Frances puts down the quill. She casts a wistful glance at one of Hugh's many letters on the desk.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - DAY

Decorated for Christmas. Frances battles to remain awake as she opens her Christmas present. Hugh watches her with hopeful anticipation.

FRANCES
You always give the most thoughtful
Christmas presents.

HUGH
I hope you like it.

Frances is thrilled to find that the gift is a novel!

INSERT - BOOK COVER

"Shamela - By - Henry Fielding"

BACK TO SCENE

HUGH (cont'd)
I realize that you have a love-hate
relationship with Mr. Richardson, so
I figured you would enjoy a bawdy
parody of his book *Pamela*.

FRANCES
Shameful - yet, I expect I will enjoy
every word of it.

HUGH
It is splendid fun. However, you must
admit that there is not a man among
us that can write like Richardson.

Frances yawns.

FRANCES
Sorry. Late nights.

HUGH
(crestfallen)
Oh. I see.

Frances turns to chapter one of *Shamela*. She doses off with her head on Hugh's shoulder, the book cradled in her arms. Hugh is left sitting there, not knowing what to do.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Frances writes as rapidly as her quill can travel over the paper. She is bleary-eyed, yet determined.

SUPER: "February, 1778."

FRANCES

The end.

Frances sighs relief. She gets a fresh sheet of paper and writes.

INSERT - LETTER

In perfect men's round hand:

"Dear Sirs, The liberty which I take in addressing to you this query will doubtless move your wonder and probably your contempt."

BACK TO SCENE

KNOCK at the door.

Frances frantically covers up the letter.

CHARLES (O.S.)

I am departing shortly to deliver my manuscript to Lowe and Son.

Charles' FOOTSTEPS fade as he descends the staircase.

Frances is amused by her reaction to hide her enterprise. She inks the quill and continues the query letter.

FRANCES (V.O.)

(as she writes...)

Without name, without recommendation, and unknown to success, I apply for your patronage. Let not the anxious solicitude with which I recommend myself to your notice expose me to your derision.

FLASHBACK:

INT. PEARCE FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - NIGHT

Frances is huddled over her manuscript as she writes.

FRANCES (V.O.)
 Remember, Gentlemen, you were all
 young writers once and by
 recollecting your first publication
 and those first terrors you will
 allow for mine.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

Frances and Miles waltz across the dance floor.

FRANCES (V.O.)
 My novel, *Evelina*, tells the story of
 a young woman, educated in the most
 secluded retirement and, at the age
 of seventeen, makes her first
 appearance upon the great and busy
 stage of life. If you would honor me
 with a proper read of my words, you
 shall find my voice in *Evelina*.

EXT. HILL'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY - DAY

Frances wistfully gazes at books on display in the window.

FRANCES (V.O.)
 I thank you in advance and look
 forward in hopeful anticipation to
 seeing my novel in the circulating
 libraries.

END FLASHBACK.

FRANCES
 (as she writes...)
 I have the honor to be, Gentlemen,
 your most obedient and humble
 servant. Signed, Anonymous.

Frances emphatically places the quill in its holder.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Charles cradles his manuscript under an arm and is about to
 open the door when Frances descends the stairs. She presents
 a parcel to Charles.

FRANCES
 Belated letters, for Hugh.

CHARLES

It is customary to correspond one letter at a time.

FRANCES

Would it trouble you to deliver them to him along with your manuscript - and can you keep it a surprise? I want Hugh to find them waiting for him in the morning.

Charles winks as he walks out the door.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - DAY (NEXT MORNING)

Hugh starts his day by finding two new manuscripts, *Evelina* and *History of Opera* on his desk. He glances through the first page or two of *Evelina*.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - LATER (EVENING)

Frances and Hugh converse. Frances cradles a parcel wrapped with string.

FRANCES

Have you read Father's manuscript?

HUGH

Not a single word. I would rather read letters from you. Sadly, all I get are hands pricked by thorns.

(playfully)

It seems as if *miles* have come between us.

Frances rolls her eyes at him.

Hugh indicates the parcel in her hands.

FRANCES

Oh, yes. What is it?

HUGH

You must open it to find out.

Frances rips open the parcel and is amazed to find that Hugh has unwittingly brought her manuscript *Evelina*!

HUGH (cont'd)

A fresh manuscript, yet to be considered for publication.

FRANCES

That would account for its half-dressed appearance, lacking a cover.

HUGH

That is what is to be blamed for my distraction from your father's book. I must admit, the first few pages are not terrible.

FRANCES

Evelina: Or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World. Do you call that an alluring title?

HUGH

Too sentimental. And the author is anonymous. The worst kind.

FRANCES

How did you come by it?

HUGH

It magically appeared on my desk last night.

Charles comes knocking. He is dressed in his finery.

CHARLES

I am off to the opera. Hugh, if you are still here upon my return, we shall have a Madeira and discuss my book.

Charles steps out and closes the door behind him.

HUGH

You are taking a night off from the opera?

FRANCES

Miles' understudy performs tonight.

HUGH

And he did not call on you? What a shame.

FRANCES

You sound like a jealous schoolboy.

HUGH

I was making light of Mr. Hazelton's odious mistake in judgment.

FRANCES

You are jealous that I would rather dance with him than practice correspondence with you.

HUGH

You can spend every single day with that singer. That is your choice.

FRANCES

Now Mr. Hazelton is - *that singer*?

HUGH

Would you like to read *Evelina*?

FRANCES

I suppose we can read a page or two. We have an hour before sunset.

Hugh makes himself comfortable at the desk chair. Frances takes a seat by the window for reading light.

HUGH

All that I ask of you, Fanny, is that you do not glance at me every now and then to see if I am still awake. It has been a long day.

Frances reads the manuscript.

FRANCES

(reads...)

In the republic of letters, there is no member of such inferior rank, or who is so much disdained by his brethren of the quill, as the humble Novelist.

HUGH

Your father might fancy this one.

FRANCES

(reads...)

The following letters are presented to the Public - for such, by novel writers, novel readers will be called.

Frances reads. Hugh's mild interest grows into riveted attention. Sun sets outside the window, passing through twilight to darkness.

FRANCES (cont'd)

(reads...)

In a short time, Lord Orville returned. I consented, with the best grace I could, to another dance. It occurred to me, that, insignificant as I was, compared to a man of his rank and figure, since he had been so unfortunate as to make choice of me for a partner, I should endeavor to make the best of it.

Frances sets the manuscript down.

HUGH

Candles! Candles!

FRANCES

Are you not exhausted?

HUGH

The story is wonderful. We must light candles. Candles, I say!

Frances is fast to her feet!

FRANCES

Does it sound real to you? All about the young lady who is about to enter the world?

HUGH

Not merely does it sound real, it is real! It is reality!

FRANCES

You really think so?

HUGH

The man who wrote this is something of a genius.

FRANCES

You do not think it possible that the author is a woman?

HUGH

Will you get the candles, Fanny? It seems that you are sorely in need of illumination if you put that question to me seriously.

FRANCES

You think there is nothing womanly in the story?

HUGH

There is plenty that is womanly, because the man who wrote it knows how to convey to a reader a sense of womanliness. That is his genius.

FRANCES

Do you consider the writer has a deeper understanding of Evelina than if she were imagined by Richardson?

HUGH

Absolutely! Evelina is attracted to a gentleman who respects her in every way. Now, no more chatter and get the candles.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - STAIRCASE - CONTINUOUS

Frances grins from ear to ear as she descends the stairs!

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances steps in with two candles. She sets the candles on the desk and lights them.

FRANCES

I think we can get through two more chapters tonight.

HUGH

The entirety.

FRANCES

You have heard a great deal of it already.

HUGH

What you read seems to me to be as good as anything I have read in years. But that is not saying that the remainder may not be so greatly inferior as to compel me to pronounce unfavorably of the book as a whole.

Frances reads as time passes.

FRANCES

(reads...)

As soon as the company was engaged with cards, Lord Orville exerted his utmost eloquence to reconcile me to this hasty plan; but how was I startled when he told me that next Tuesday was the day appointed by my father to be the most important of my life.

Clock chimes midnight. Frances pulls her nose out of the manuscript. She yawns as she rises from her chair.

FRANCES (cont'd)

Evelina will be the better for a sleep. Please make yourself at home in the guestroom.

HUGH

Please, may I have the manuscript? I usually awake before six, and so shall have a couple of hours of it before rising. I would like to know how it resolves before morning tea.

FRANCES

We will leave it here upon the desk and we shall finish as we have begun.

Hugh does not budge. Frances holds her ground.

FRANCES (cont'd)

Goodnight.

Hugh bows and walks out. Frances follows and closes the door. Neither thought to snuff out the candles.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - LATER

The clock chimes two o'clock in the morning.

Charles enters from the street. He is weary from a long night of opera and party. Silence, save for the TICKING clock, gives him pause. He had expected Hugh to greet him for their nightcap.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Charles pours himself a glass of wine.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

Charles is on his way to bed when a warm glow from under the sewing room door gives him pause. He gently taps on the door. Hearing no reply, he slowly opens the door.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Charles enters the candlelit room. He looks about as if he expects someone to be there. He shakes his head disapprovingly and extinguishes one of two candles. He is about to extinguish its pair, but stops short when he catches a glimpse of the manuscript upon the table. He examines the cover. The title startles him!

Charles pulls close the candle and flips to one of the final pages of the manuscript.

Hugh strolls in, half asleep, and both men are startled at the presence of the other!

CHARLES

What the devil!

HUGH

Your daughter has given me a sleepless night.

CHARLES

I beg your pardon?

HUGH

I lay awake endeavoring to determine what would be the outcome of Lord Orville proposing marriage.

CHARLES

Lord Orville?

HUGH

A character in that masterpiece of a book. - I see you have given into the evil of novel reading.

Charles gives a look of puzzlement and then, realizing he has *Evelina* open before him, chuckles and shakes his head.

HUGH (cont'd)

I worked out the story to its proper conclusion - so I thought - on my left side.

(MORE)

HUGH (cont'd)

But, when I turned on my right, I found that I had been grossly astray in all my fancies.

CHARLES

Do you consider this a good book?

HUGH

It is worthy of being placed between *Clarissa* and *Pamela*.

CHARLES

Extravagant praise.

HUGH

I could never understand you banning novels, but now I see the wisdom of it. They tend to unsettle one. Read not a word of it. Go to bed and save yourself from the evil influence of *Evelina*. Goodnight.

Hugh leaves. Charles goes to the door to make sure that Hugh is gone. He tiptoes back to the desk, sits down and flips to one of the last chapters in the manuscript.

Charles looks up from the page and gasps!

Charles flips the page and reads line after line.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY (MORNING)

Frances and Charles at breakfast. Charles occasionally glances at Frances. Frances appears perplexed by her father's odd behavior. Hugh walks in. He is dressed for the road in coat and hat.

FRANCES

You are not staying?

HUGH

I am expected at the office.

FRANCES

What a pity.

HUGH

So, Mr. Burney, was I correct to say the book is enthralling?

Charles closely examines the pattern on his plate.

CHARLES

I would not know.

HUGH

Ah! Those dark rings about your eyes betray you, sir. Is it not true that it is to blame for your lack of rest last night?

FRANCES

What book is that, Father? A source for your *History of Opera*?

CHARLES

A manuscript with the title -
Evelina: Or, the History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.

Frances has the expression of a caught thief.

HUGH

(to Frances)

I am grateful to you for reading it to me last night. And you are quite an accomplished reader. It was as if you knew Evelina before reading her words.

CHARLES

Not a finer work of fiction will you find than this new masterpiece.

HUGH

I wish we knew who the master was.

CHARLES

Do you intend to publish it?

HUGH

The story is a revolutionary treatment of romance; one that stands out as suitable for young ladies.

CHARLES

That would broaden your readership.

HUGH

This is true.

CHARLES

Furthermore, would there be nothing more profitable than a successful novel for which no authorship may be attributed?

HUGH

I suppose I could consider taking a risk on an anonymous publication.

FRANCES

Does that mean you consider it ready?

HUGH

All manuscripts require an editor's touch. Without knowledge of the author, it would be left to me to secure one.

CHARLES

I will edit it for you.

HUGH

You, sir? A novel?

CHARLES

It will expand my reach as a writer.

HUGH

I will see to it that you receive a generous fee for your work.

Charles and Hugh shake hands.

HUGH (cont'd)

Be hasty with your edits. If I do not soon learn what happens to Evelina in the last few chapters, I shall be inconsolable.

Frances and Charles come eye to eye. Charles can barely conceal his amusement. Frances is suddenly embarrassed and turns her eyes away.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - DINING ROOM - LATER (SAME MORNING)

Frances clears the table. Charles walks in. In his hand is the manuscript *Evelina*.

CHARLES

I fear that this duplicity has been going on for a long time.

Frances stands still, doubtful of what is going to happen.

CHARLES (cont'd)
It was you who wrote *Evelina* and
under my very nose. Am I correct?

FRANCES
I did not mean any disrespect.

CHARLES
You do not deny it?

FRANCES
I am proud of it.

Charles hands the manuscript to Frances.

CHARLES
Impressive use of round hand. Your
handwriting had me guessing.

FRANCES
How did you conclude it was me?

CHARLES
Last night, I came across your
manuscript and sat down to peruse a
late chapter. It lay beneath my eyes,
and I tell you truly that I did not
seem to read it. I seemed to hear
your voice reading the verses in my
ear, and the truth came upon me,
incredible though it appeared, I knew
that it was you who had written it.

FRANCES
How does it read?

CHARLES
There is no difference between it and
a real book.

Charles winks.

CHARLES (cont'd)
I owe you an apology. Years ago, I
read some scorched pages of a book
that your sister fetched from the
fireplace. I believe you titled your
story, *Evelina's Adventures*?

FRANCES
The Adventures of Evelina. You knew?

CHARLES

Yes. It concerned me that you may try to follow in my footsteps only to be rejected and end up disillusioned and hurt.

FRANCES

And that is why I was forbidden from reading novels after mother passed.

CHARLES

I feared what would become of you, a timid child reading in the corner with no evident prospects of success.

FRANCES

I have always felt that you have very little confidence in my abilities.

CHARLES

You very well may be the most talented Burney. I am sorry that I did not see it sooner.

FRANCES

How could you have seen me at all, when all those years, your world revolved around Hannah.

CHARLES

Can you ever forgive me?

FRANCES

This is a great deal to consider.

CHARLES

Fair enough. Now, we must get *Evelina* ready for publication with an editor's eye.

FRANCES

Do you remember when you taught me the alphabet?

CHARLES

Oh, yes! The upside-down pages.

FRANCES

You are doing it again.

CHARLES

Doing what?

FRANCES
Upside-down help.

Charles appears puzzled.

FRANCES (cont'd)
You volunteered to edit my work
without asking me first. I can do
this on my own.

CHARLES
I know you can.

FRANCES
I am confused.

CHARLES
You are going to revise *Evelina*
yourself. We need Hugh to believe
that I am the editor so you may see
it through to publication.

Frances hugs Charles.

CHARLES (cont'd)
You must read the book, page to page,
with a diligence beyond the author's
eyes. That said, there is really no
mistake on any page I read, so far as
I could see.

FRANCES
Unless the whole is a mistake.

Charles bursts into laughter.

FRANCES (cont'd)
That thought amuses you?

CHARLES
Tell me. Was *Evelina* the parcel of
letters I delivered to Hugh's office?

FRANCES
I did not mislead you, entirely. My
book is, after all, a series of
letters.

CHARLES
Thomas has not the slightest notion
that he is about to publish my
daughter's book!

(MORE)

CHARLES (cont'd)

Tell me how you got your knowledge of the things in that book - the pictures red with life - blood of men and women - love - emotion - pathos - all that makes up life. Not to mention the characterization - that is what seems to me all but miraculous. Tell me, if you can - author to author - how you filled your canvas?

Frances opens the manuscript and flips to a page.

FRANCES

Well, Father, let's start where Evelina first arrives in London.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - NIGHT

Charles, Miles and BERNARD (30s), Hannah's handsome husband and a singer, are happy with drink as they entertain themselves at the far end of the parlor.

Frances and Hannah quietly look on from the other end of the room. The men pay them no notice. Frances looks downcast.

The men and women are separated far enough apart as to not hear each other.

MILES

I understand that Hannah no longer plays piano in public.

BERNARD

A good woman will avoid publicity. Her home should be sufficient for her.

MILES

I will drink to that!

Miles, Bernard and Charles clank their glasses!

HANNAH

Just look at them. They are quite pleased with themselves.

FRANCES

I never considered there would be so many opening nights.

KNOCKING at the front door.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Hannah stays a few steps back as Frances answers the door. It is Hugh and he has a small gift-wrapped box in his hand. Hugh hears the men's drunken laughter and searches Frances' face for a clue as to what is transpiring.

FRANCES
Opening night.

Hugh presents the gift to Frances.

HUGH
Happy birthday.

Frances opens the box and finds an elegant quill pen and holder set. She is overwhelmed.

HUGH (cont'd)
I have never forgotten that day when you inquired about publishing on behalf of your literary lady friend. Perhaps, you might consider writing a novel some day.

Frances is rendered speechless.

Miles and Bernard appear in the passageway.

Hugh and Miles come eye to eye.

Hugh kisses Frances on the hand and he is out the door.

MILES
(to Bernard)
It is just the correspondence tutor. Come, I need another drink.

Miles and Bernard stumble off.

Frances looks to Hannah.

HANNAH
Hugh remembered.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - CHARLES' STUDY - NIGHT

Frances writes with an unsteady hand and strains to read with tired eyes. She uses the new quill pen set that Hugh gave her as a birthday present.

Charles pokes his head in.

CHARLES
Seeing you at that desk brings back
fond memories.

FRANCES
So many mistakes.

CHARLES
You shall persevere. I know you.

FRANCES
Father, if I ever have a daughter who
shows difficulty reading, I will turn
the page upside-down as well.

Charles smiles.

Frances holds up her hand!

FRANCES (cont'd)
However, I will explain the purpose
of my actions to her, so she is not
left feeling incapable.

Charles nods his head in understanding.

CHARLES
It really hurt me, when you said that
Hugh is the only one who understands
you since Esther passed, God rest her
soul.

FRANCES
That is how I truly felt.

CHARLES
Past tense?

Frances nods and gives her father a hug.

FRANCES
I am afraid of being inferior in the
eyes of the world.

Charles tries to lighten her mood with a joke.

CHARLES
There is no cause for concern. You
are anonymous.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Frances wraps the edited *Evelina* in brown paper and string.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

Charles, parcel with *Evelina* in hand, heads out the door.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - PRINTING ROOM - DAY (MORNING)

PRINTER thumbs through *Evelina* and frowns. He quizzically examines a line of text with a magnifying glass.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - LATER (MORNING)

Through the glass in the door, we observe Printer speaking to Thomas. Thomas' face darkens.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - LATER (EVENING)

Thomas reads the final page of *Evelina* while Hugh anxiously paces.

THOMAS

(reading...)

The fate of your *Evelina* is decided! This morning, with fearful joy and trembling gratitude, she united herself for ever with the object of her dearest, her eternal affection. I have time for no more; the chaise now waits which is to conduct me to dear Berry Hill, and to the arms of the best of men. *Evelina*. The end.

Thomas clasps his hands in contemplation.

HUGH

A masterpiece. Do you agree?

Thomas nods his agreement.

HUGH (cont'd)

I will instruct the printers to commence with the first run.

THOMAS

Son, are you in earnest in saying that you are unaware of the author?

HUGH

He has not revealed himself.

THOMAS

You assume this is the work of a man?

HUGH

Of course, it is the work of a man.

THOMAS

I have a suspicion. We must not make the accident of publishing a lady.

HUGH

But you surely noticed the masculine handwriting of the script?

THOMAS

That is just the point. Our printers have examined it and say that it is a lady's calligraphy only disguised to look like a man's. In my own judgment, they are right.

HUGH

Ridiculous!

Thomas indicates for Hugh to approach the desk, which he does. Thomas opens the book to a random page and examines the handwriting. Hugh feigns interest to appease Thomas.

THOMAS

See here. It is an upright round hand, neat and clear. The hand is, for the most part, too perfect. Too exact. And, there is the issue of an occasional slip into 'ladies' hand.' This is the work of a woman pretending to be a man.

HUGH

What of it? The fact remains that this is the best book since Fielding.

THOMAS

I know you harbor sympathies for literary ladies. However, I cannot allow you to publish this fraud. We would find ourselves pilloried by all of London.

HUGH

This book deserves many readers.

Thomas slams his fist upon the desk!

THOMAS
I will not be humiliated by
publishing a woman!

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - LATER

Hugh peruses Charles' book, *The History Of Opera*, bound in cover.

HUGH
I despise Opera.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - DAY

Frances looks out the window and fights back tears. Hannah sits near Frances. She, too, appears saddened.

SUPER: "Autumn of 1778."

Charles rushes in, full of enthusiasm!

CHARLES
I just came from Lowe and Son. My book is to be made available to the circulating libraries! This the best news! And look at this...

Charles holds up a fountain pen!

CHARLES (cont'd)
Latest invention from Germany. Hugh gave it to me.

Frances breaks down sobbing.

Charles looks to Hannah, the emotionally in touch one, for guidance, and Hannah gives him a look as she goes to comfort her sister.

FRANCES
Oh, Father, it is too cruel. I worked so hard at my book. You were right. All my trouble has gone for naught.

CHARLES
It is only cruel if it sets you crying in this way. Writing a book is like throwing a stone into the ocean.
(MORE)

CHARLES (cont'd)

It may fall so that it makes a splash and sinks down straightaway - or - it may fall so that it forms ripples. However, it will sink to the bottom all the same. Success or failure is only the difference between a splash and a ripple.

FRANCES

I was a fool to think that my little stone would float.

CHARLES

It takes time to print a book. I am sure Hugh is working hard at it.

FRANCES

I was beginning to feel that I had the right to consider myself an author. This failure has put me back in my place.

HANNAH

Perhaps, *Evelina* is not a stone. What if *Evelina* is a raindrop?

FRANCES

A raindrop?

HANNAH

Raindrops make ripples, and, unlike stones, they do not sink. A raindrop becomes one with the ocean.

Frances and Charles exchange confused glances.

HANNAH (cont'd)

Those that came before you, Elstob, Manly, Haywood to name a few, have rained into the same ocean of our literary experience, while so many other women have been denied their voice.

CHARLES

(to Frances)

Like I nearly denied yours.

HANNAH

What if your book is the first drop of rain that springs forth a new era of respectably for female authors?

FRANCES

I consider you are making too much of my book. You speak of it being the first drop of rain while it gathers dust in Hugh's office.

HANNAH

Evelina is a strong woman. Her creator is even more so. Have a little faith. Your book will one day reach the shelves of many women.

CHARLES

Some of them may one day wield their own quills.

INT. GRAND BALLROOM - NIGHT

Miles and Frances make a grand entrance complete with the cessation of MUSIC and applause directed at Miles. Miles soaks in the attention. He guides Frances to the refreshments and serves up drinks.

MILES

How many performances does this make?

FRANCES

I have been to twenty - no - I believe this one makes twenty-one.

MILES

It seems as if a moment has passed since I first set eyes upon you, and you tell me that you have seen over twenty of my performances already.

FRANCES

Been to that many. Watched but a few scenes, here and there.

MILES

I suppose opera is not sentimental enough. Or, is it that my voice offends your ears?

FRANCES

An opera requires so much attention, it is scarce possible to keep awake if one listens. By the time it is evening, I am so fatigued with dining and wine, well, it is perfectly an impossibility.

MILES

If you were a man, I would consider this a provocation sufficient for a duel. Alas, you are a beautiful woman, and I would much prefer to challenge you to a waltz.

Miles bows. Frances curtsies. They dance.

FRANCES

I am afraid. Is this the place? Is this the time? Are you the one?

MILES

Every place is our place. Every time is our time. And you are the only one for me.

Miles takes her in his arms and initiates a passionate kiss! This uninvited kiss startles Frances and she pulls away!

MILES (cont'd)

I assumed you wanted to.

FRANCES

If you and I were alone, perhaps, and with me granting you permission.

MILES

What are these people? They are nothing to us. Less than nothing.

FRANCES

All eyes will be upon us. People will naturally assume that the renowned opera singer is having an affair with one of his fawning fans.

MILES

What are people in a church to the devout who enters and keeps his eyes fixed upon the lovely face of the saint to whom he prays? The saint and he are in communion together, and their communion isolates them though the church is crowded.

FRANCES

Am I supposed to be the saint?

MILES

Indeed, you are, my beautiful saint.
I look into your face and I have a
glimpse of heaven itself. I love you.

Frances looks down.

MILES (cont'd)

Let our eyes meet and it will be as
if our lips had met.

Frances raises her head slowly until her eyes meet his.

MILES (cont'd)

I am just a man, like any other man.
But I feel, gazing into the face of
my saint, as if I were immortal and
crossing the threshold of the heaven
that is hers. It is only then that I
feel that we are equal.

Miles attempts a kiss! Frances leans away from him.

FRANCES

This is madness. Equals, you say?

MILES

I am going to address your father to
seek his blessing.

FRANCES

I need time to consider.

Miles furrows his brow.

EXT. PARK - ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Frances and Hannah sit on a bench. Frances appears
distracted and confused.

FRANCES

Miles is to seek Father's permission
to take me as his wife.

HANNAH

Is it fair for me to assume that you
gave your approval?

FRANCES

Miles never seeks approval. He simply
assumes.

HANNAH

I had an inkling that would be your response.

FRANCES

Father will most certainly approve the transaction.

HANNAH

I suspect he will.

FRANCES

This does place quite a different complexion upon my future.

HANNAH

You sound repentant before the deed is done. Proposals can be refused.

FRANCES

I am in too deep. To runaway now would exhibit very bad taste. Besides, he is in love with me. You have said as much, yourself.

HANNAH

Yes, but does he respect you?

FRANCES

When it comes to desire, Miles has a huge appetite.

HANNAH

Is that true of Hugh?

FRANCES

Hugh has never made advances. He is a dear friend, nothing more.

HANNAH

I would not be so hasty as to dismiss a man for being a dear friend, especially one as respectful as Hugh.

FRANCES

I should have known what all that entertainment with Miles was meant to lead to.

HANNAH

What did it lead to?

FRANCES
Miles assuming that I am his! Have
you been listening?

HANNAH
You mean, like the gentlemen at
Evelina's first formal ball?

Frances appears puzzled.

HANNAH (cont'd)
I believe Evelina wrote in one of her
letters that the gentlemen thought
she was quite at their disposal. -
Your character, Lord Orville, invests
a great deal of his time to learn
Evelina. She is the center of his
world. Every word she speaks is dear
to him; much like Hugh treasures your
letters. Perhaps, you should read
that book of yours.

Frances furrows her brow.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - DAY

Thomas glares at Hugh from behind his desk.

THOMAS
Am I to understand that you
instructed our printers to proceed
with the publication of *Evelina*?

HUGH
I did.

THOMAS
You disobeyed me.

HUGH
I made a prudent business decision.

THOMAS
It is our business to publish
gentlemen authors.

HUGH
All of my authors are simply authors.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Frances sews a tablecloth. Her head droops in sadness.

Charles walks in. His mood is serious.

CHARLES

My dear, I am no believer in leading
by degrees up to such a communication
as I have to make to you.

FRANCES

What is it, Father?

CHARLES

Mr. Hazelton secured my permission
for him to address you with a view to
marriage.

Frances' eyes well up with tears.

FRANCES

I beg your pardon. I am behaving like
a goose, but I cannot help it.
Something occurred to me these past
few days. I do not believe that Miles
knows me well enough to love me. And
I do not feel as deeply for him as
Evelina does for Lord Orville.

CHARLES

Miles intentions are honorable. If
you have no tender regard for him at
present, that is no reason why, when
you get accustomed to the thought of
him as a suitor for your hand -

FRANCES

I daresay that Miles thinks himself
generous in his proposal. And, I am
well aware the wages of a dressmaker
will not afford me the life I desire.
That is my curse of having an
expensive childhood.

CHARLES

You were denied your portion. That is
my failing, not yours.

FRANCES

I had hoped that the day would soon come when I could write under my own name and earn enough to purchase my freedom from fate.

CHARLES

I have come to fear that Lowe and Son may not be of the mind to publish your wonderful book.

FRANCES

And that is why real choice alludes me.

EXT. PARK - ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Frances and Miles stroll up to the rosebush.

Miles goes down on one knee!

Frances is impassive, yet she nods and fakes a smile.

Miles takes her hand.

Frances glances wistfully at the rosebush.

MILES

You can give up dressmaking now. You will never have to lift a finger as long as you have me.

Frances stares vacantly at the path.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - DAY

Hugh stacks bound copies of *Evelina* ready to deliver to the circulating libraries.

Thomas walks in and stares deadpan at the stack.

HUGH

Evelina will taken London by storm.

THOMAS

I just came from the Burney house. Frances is engaged to Mr. Hazelton, the singer. She has done quite well for herself, considering her general lack of talents. See you at supper.

Thomas walks out.

Hugh stares blankly at the stack of books.

EXT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - DAY (MORNING)

Miles taps his walking cane against the front door.

Frances appears in an upstairs window. She throws up the sash and pokes her head out.

FRANCES

Miles! What are you doing here?

MILES

Good morning to you, too.

FRANCES

I have not begun to dress and Father is shopping in the Strand.

MILES

Then, we have the day to ourselves. I will come up.

FRANCES

Certainly not! It would be scandalous!

MILES

We are, after all, engaged to be wed.

FRANCES

Which means that I am not yet your wife, and you are not quite my husband. What are you doing here hours before our agreed upon time?

MILES

Maestro Joshua cut rehearsal short. It was entirely unexpected.

FRANCES

Was he feeling ill?

MILES

Fit as a fiddle. His excuse for his impulsive behavior was some book.

FRANCES

A book?

MILES

Yes. Maestro Joshua announced his desire to get back to a novel which he affirms is the best he has read since Richardson. Can you imagine? Leaving rehearsal for some book!

FRANCES

What was its name?

MILES

The opera?

FRANCES

The book, of course.

MILES

Oh, that. *Evelina*, I believe.

Frances gasps and slams shut the sash!

Miles stands there, bewildered.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Frances is in a state of pure wonderment!

EXT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - CONTINUOUS

Miles is a few steps from the front door when he is forced to divert from his path to allow Charles to pass. Charles hurries towards the door like a man on a mission.

MILES

Mr. Burney, can you let Frances know that I...?

Charles is so full of fatherly pride that he passes right by Miles without paying him notice. Charles enters the house in record setting time.

Miles is utterly dumbfounded.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - CONTINUOUS

CHARLES

(up the stairs)

Frances! Come down at once! I have grand news!

Frances comes down the stairs.

FRANCES
What has you all a dither?

CHARLES
I went to Hill's Library in the Strand, to inquire as to the circulation of my book, and there, sure enough, I saw your *Evelina* on display with the new releases!

FRANCES
Hill's Library? Are you quite certain it was my *Evelina*?

CHARLES
You must see for yourself. Shall we?

Frances smiles.

FRANCES
This is what I would call *right side up help*.

INT. HILL'S CIRCULATING LIBRARY - LATER

Men and Women peruse titles on display.

Library Man makes himself useful with some work behind the counter.

Door BELL RINGS as Frances and Charles enter. Frances is drawn to her *Evelina* on the shelf with the new arrivals. She glances at Charles. His eyes are fixated on her *Evelina* as well. Frances can see the immense pride in her father's eyes. She smiles and pulls *Evelina* from the shelf.

Frances slides her book in front of the Library Man.

FRANCES
Before I part with my hard earned money, I am curious as to what this book is about?

LIBRARY MAN
It is bad enough that I am compelled to hand out books all day to readers without being forced to read them myself. But, I suppose that *Evelina* is a novel of the usual sort.

FRANCES

That is not extravagant praise.
Perhaps, I should return it to the
shelf where I found it.

LIBRARY MAN

I sold five copies this morning. I
have been told that one of the ladies
who has read it was ready to speak
well of it. Another has taken it away
a second time.

Door BELL RINGS.

FOOTMAN (adult) enters and approaches the counter.

LIBRARY MAN (cont'd)

(to Frances)

If you will excuse me.

(to Footman)

May I help you?

FOOTMAN

I am here for a copy of *Evelina*.

FRANCES

(in lighthearted
fun)

For the delectation of the servants'
hall, I am sure.

FOOTMAN

Not at all! It had been recommended
to her Ladyship. I have been
commanded on no account to return
without it.

Library Man slides a copy of *Evelina* across the counter to
Footman. Footman places twelve shillings on the counter.

LIBRARY MAN

You pay too much. It is nine
shillings bound in cover, not twelve.

FOOTMAN

Her Ladyship is liberal.

FRANCES

The book must be quite good.

Female CUSTOMER (adult) steps forward and speaks to Frances.

CUSTOMER

I am dead tired on account of its goodness, for I was fool enough to take it to bed with me last night, and I never closed my eyes in sleep.

EXT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - LATER

Frances and Charles gleefully stroll up the path to the house. Frances has a copy of *Evelina* tucked under her arm.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - CONTINUOUS

Frances is in awe at the sight of her book!

FRANCES

She is beautiful! Hugh does wonderful work.

Charles places his hands gently upon Frances' shoulders.

CHARLES

Frances, it is raining.

EXT. PARK - TEA GARDEN - DAY

Hannah and Frances stroll the path.

It is a gorgeous day and there are quite a few fashionable ladies sipping tea and sharing the latest society news.

Hannah spots Mrs. Evans seated with MRS. HALES (40s). Both women are dressed in their park outing finery. The table has two open chairs and two tea services set before them, as if the ladies are expecting guests.

Hannah gently nudges Frances to get her attention and indicates Mrs. Evans.

HANNAH

Do you recall Mrs. Evans?

FRANCES

She has been several times at our house, when I was a child and Father's book was popular.

HANNAH

Father used to make me play piano for her entertainment.

FRANCES

And she would inquire; who is the little shy one without musical talents?

HANNAH

Dr. Johnson has her edit all of his books. She is quite good at it, from what I have been told.

Frances appears suspicious that Hannah is up to something.

HANNAH (cont'd)

She can be a bore, mind you. Every dinner is the same. She drones on and on about the latest novel she has edited. And, she harbors aspirations of being a novelist, herself.

FRANCES

I take it that this is no accident - Mrs. Evans at a table with two invitingly empty chairs.

HANNAH

Let's learn how London's literary ladies consider your book.

Hannah and Frances walk towards Mrs. Evans. Mrs. Evans catches a glimpse of Hannah and smiles politely.

MRS. EVANS

Mrs. Hales, may I introduce my dear friend, Mrs. Pearce.

HANNAH

Pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Hales. Allow me to introduce my sister, Miss Frances Burney.

MRS. EVANS

(to Frances)

Oh, my dear, it has been ages. The little shy one in the corner. Look at you, all grown up.

MRS. HALES

Pleasure to make your acquaintance. I hope you do not mind a fourth.

MRS. EVANS

This is our usual day for tea in the park.

Frances and Hannah take the open seats at the table.

MRS. HALES

I was just inquiring if Mrs. Evans' friend, Dr. Johnson, had a finger in writing the new sensation of a novel, *Evelina*.

Frances and Hannah exchange glances. Hannah is amused. Frances reserves judgment.

HANNAH

Are you saying that the authorship of this new masterpiece is a mystery?

Mrs. Hales smiles knowingly. She leans in, ready to share her secret.

MRS. HALES

London has had many conjectures. They are all wrong. I have solved the puzzle and my friends agree. The author is none other than our dear friend - Mrs. Evans.

Mrs. Evans flushes and fans herself. Her affectation of surprise has an artificial note about it.

Frances does her very best to hide her growing resentment. Hannah is the only one who notices her sister's bitter mood. Hannah enjoys this conversation as if watching a comedy.

MRS. EVANS

Pray, how could it enter the mind of any of your friends to connect me with the authorship of such a book?

MRS. HALES

Some have said that only you could have had the varied experiences described so vividly.

HANNAH

Are you saying that Dr. Johnson had no influence on the book?

FRANCES

It has been expressed in my presence that *Evelina* is the work of a man.

MRS. EVANS

Dr. Johnson reads to me all that he writes, and I can assure you that the name Evelina has not once appeared in his books.

MRS. HALES

Your secret is safe with us, Mrs. Evans. Tell us. Are you the author?

MRS. EVANS

Dear ladies, if an author desires to remain anonymous, is it not discourteous to try to snatch away her veil of anonymity?

Mrs. Evans winks.

EXT. PARK - BANK OF POND - CONTINUOUS

Frances angrily skips stones across the water.

HANNAH

Mrs. Hales is sure to hasten back to her friends and whisper in their ears that the mystery is good as solved.

FRANCES

Mrs. Evans will be acknowledged as the author of my book.

HANNAH

Perhaps, you should reveal yourself.

FRANCES

That ship has sailed. To reveal myself now would destroy Hugh's career.

HANNAH

What would Evelina do?

FRANCES

She would not be one to cry over spilt milk.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - SEWING ROOM - DAY

Frances observes as Hugh sews the final touches on a basic dress. Hugh takes a moment to examine his fine work and he is quite pleased with his masterpiece.

HUGH
You have turned me into something of
a dressmaker.

FRANCES
Well done. Consider this dress your
first drop of rain.

HUGH
My what?

FRANCES
Seamstress humor.

HUGH
Oh. I do hope we may continue our
lessons once you are settled at Mr.
Hazelton's estate.

FRANCES
I would like that.

HUGH
I have something for you.

Hugh retrieves his messenger bag and opens the flap.

FRANCES
Regrettably, I do not have the time
for a book. There is much to prepare
for a wedding.

Hugh produces a gift-wrapped box from the messenger bag and
presents it to Frances.

FRANCES (cont'd)
What is it?

HUGH
You must open it to find out.

Frances unwraps the box. She is bewildered by the gift.

HUGH (cont'd)
An early wedding gift.

FRANCES
I do not know what to say.

HUGH
Try it for size.

Frances produces an EAR TRUMPET from the box!

HUGH (cont'd)
It is what they call an ear trumpet.

FRANCES
I can see what it is. I am not blind.
However, you seem to consider me
somewhat hard of hearing.

HUGH
Never judge by cover alone. May I?

Frances hands him the ear trumpet.

HUGH (cont'd)
I know how you always wanted to play
a musical instrument, so I considered
you should have the most expensive
musical device in all of London.

Hugh holds the ear trumpet to his ear, as if to use it for
its intended purpose.

HUGH (cont'd)
Have you ever seen a musician who
could play an instrument with his
ear?

Frances giggles.

FRANCES
I seriously doubt anyone has.

HUGH
A vast amount of ingenuity is needed
to produce even the simplest sound.
However, with practice, you will soon
be the envy of the concert hall.

Hugh makes a silly face as he pretends to blow air out of
his ear. He hums to imitate the playing of music.

Frances bursts into laughter!

Hugh pretends to be hurt.

HUGH (cont'd)
Does my playing offend your ears?

FRANCES
You are so silly.

Hugh hums even louder as he "plays the ear trumpet."

Frances rolls up a strip of linen into a ball and sends it flying at Hugh. Hugh dodges the ball. Frances rolls up a second ball of linen. Hugh sets aside the ear trumpet. They are both in laughter.

HUGH

There goes our concert.

Frances throws the ball of linen at Hugh. He uses his hand as a battledore and sends the ball back in the direction of Frances, who, returns it with both force and precision. They both scurry to make more balls of linen as they come undone in flight, and the game is on with the players panting and laughing joyously.

EXT. PARK - TEA GARDEN - DAY

Mrs. Evans and Mrs. Hales enjoy tea and cakes.

MRS. EVANS

Poor Miss Burney. She has such an accomplished sister and no talents of her own. Oh, well. I am sure she has dreams like other girls.

MRS. HALES

I do not expect her to be poor Miss Burney much longer.

MRS. EVANS

Have you heard something?

MRS. HALES

Miss Burney has been seen in the company of Mr. Hazelton. It is rumored that they are to be wed.

MRS. EVANS

I seriously doubt that.

MRS. HALES

I have it on good authority.

MRS. EVANS

Poor girl. She is out of her depth.

MRS. HALES

I am not so certain. It turns out that she does much more than sew. In fact, she knows a thing or two about writing.

MRS. EVANS
Please, continue.

MRS. HALES
My informant told me that she is her
father's amanuensis.

MRS. EVANS
Miss Burney has literary talent?

MRS. HALES
I was told that she made a neat copy
of her father's notes for his book.

MRS. EVANS
Frances did not know her letters till
she was perhaps twelve. I do not
believe that I ever exchanged half a
dozen words with her before. She
barely said anything at tea the other
day. And, now you tell me that she is
a literary assistant that has caught
the eye of a famous tenor? I simply
cannot believe it.

Mrs. Evans appears chagrined.

MRS. EVANS (cont'd)
It occurs to me that we sound much
like our husbands.

MRS. HALES
How is that?

MRS. EVANS
Speaking disparagingly of some
unsuspecting woman simply because she
dares to use her talents and reach
for a higher shelf.

INT. EVANS HOME - DINING ROOM - DAY (MORNING)

MR. EVANS (50s), a Member of Parliament, sits at the head of
a long table. Mrs. Evans sits at the foot. They enjoy their
breakfast in silence, except for the ticking of the clock.
Mr. Evans reads the *London Chronicle* newspaper.

MR. EVANS
More novels! More stuff for the
circulating libraries! Enough to make
poor Mr. Richardson uncomfortable in
his grave!

(MORE)

MR. EVANS (cont'd)

Could he but have known that he was turning all England into novel readers, he would never have put quill to paper.

MRS. EVANS

What novel is mentioned?

MR. EVANS

Just another imitator in the field. *Evelina*, published by Mr. Lowe - sixpence sewed or nine shillings in covers.

MRS. EVANS

Did I hear you allude to the author as - *another imitator*?

MR. EVANS

The author is anonymous. I am sure that will not be the situation for much longer.

MRS. EVANS

Why do you consider that?

MR. EVANS

London is full of pretenders. I should know. There are many such men in Parliament. It is a certainty that one of these pretenders will come forward as the author, only to become the next imitator.

MRS. EVANS

The poor author will be robbed of credit and fame.

MR. EVANS

That is the way of the world, my dear. I have risen to the highest office in my search for honor. I have yet to find it.

INT. LOWE AND SON PUBLISHERS - OFFICE - LATER (AFTERNOON)

Mrs. Evans scolds Thomas. The only thing that separates them and offers Thomas some protection is his desk.

MRS. EVANS

If you are in earnest in saying that you are unaware who is the author of your *Evelina*, I have done you some service in curtailing by one the list of authors to whom it might possibly be attributed. You may strike out the name of Dr. Johnson on my authority.

THOMAS

I shall certainly do so, madam. I was never foolish enough to fancy that he had written more of it than a page or two. I am indebted to you.

MRS. EVANS

If you wish to pay off the debt, you can do so by discovering for me the writer. And, if the writer happens to be, as some suspect, a woman - you will credit her in all the London papers, without delay.

THOMAS

It is rumored that you may have had a hand in writing *Evelina*.

MRS. EVANS

I am flattered people consider me the author. I am here to tell you that I am not. It warms my heart that *Evelina* is considered the work of a woman. All of London must learn her name. Get to work and learn who she is!

Mrs. Evans storms out of the office!

Thomas slams his fist upon the desk!

THOMAS

Hugh!

Hugh comes running!

THOMAS (cont'd)

If I discover that *Evelina* was written by a woman, I will demand your resignation!

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - FOYER - LATER

Charles winds the clock. It reads four o'clock.

Frances comes into the room. She is dressed for an elegant evening, yet she is far from her radiant self.

FRANCES
Miles sent his carriage for me.

CHARLES
Where are you to meet?

FRANCES
It is a mystery. The wealthy can afford surprises.

CHARLES
You need not go through with it.

FRANCES
Miles is not the worst of them.

CHARLES
What of your feelings for Hugh?

Frances looks at Charles quizzically.

CHARLES (cont'd)
I see how you two are together. It is as if you are courting, yet, neither of you realize it.

FRANCES
I am promised to Mr. Hazelton.

CHARLES
How would you write this scene in your book?

FRANCES
Evelina would honor her word. However, she would first provide the gentleman with an opportunity to pass a test of character.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - LATER

The clock chimes five o'clock.

Hugh and Charles have settled in with their wine. Charles is cheerful. Hugh appears as if he carries the weight of the world upon his shoulders.

HUGH

The day has turned rather gloomy.

CHARLES

I expect rain to come soon enough.

HUGH

All well and good. My garden is parched.

CHARLES

I invited you here to discuss your most recent release, *Evelina*.

HUGH

I would find that topic rather tiresome.

CHARLES

Am I mistaken that it is a success?

HUGH

We cannot print copies fast enough.

CHARLES

Do you ever consider whether or not the author is aware that *Evelina* has taken London by storm?

HUGH

Evelina's authorship is a topic of contention with Father. I hope you will understand my reticence.

CHARLES

I will not speak another word about it, except for one nagging thought that I simply must share. I do believe the time has come for the author to receive credit.

HUGH

No one can possibly know who the author is. He refuses to reveal himself.

Charles grins knowingly and savors a sip of wine.

HUGH (cont'd)
Yours is the face of a man who has
formed a theory. Have you heard
something?

CHARLES
Not a mere something, but everything.

HUGH
Who is your informant?

CHARLES
The author of the book, herself.

HUGH
Herself? What are you saying?

CHARLES
The author is none other than my
daughter, Frances.

Hugh is thunderstruck!

HUGH
Fanny? Are you serious?

Charles beams with fatherly pride.

HUGH (cont'd)
She did it. She really did it! Fanny
wrote a book far better than any we
have ever published! Oh, with the
exception of your books, of course.

CHARLES
You were correct the first time.

EXT. PARK - SAME

Dark clouds gather.

Frances walks down the path. There is no bounce in her
step - no joy in her expression.

FOOTSTEPS upon the path. Frances looks around the bend. She
expects that Miles is only a few yards away from her. Then
all at once Frances hears Miles' exclamation of surprise! He
had not seen her at first; he sees her now. They gaze at
each other for a moment. The magic is gone from her eyes and
she appear emotionally detached and lost in thought.

FRANCES
This is my favorite place in all of
London.

MILES
I know.

Frances breathes in deeply as she summons courage.

FRANCES
There is something I want to share
with you.

MILES
What is it?

FRANCES
I wrote a book.

Miles furrows his brow as he tries to comprehend.

FRANCES (cont'd)
The new novel, *Evelina*.

MILES
Could it be the same *Evelina* that
caused Maestro Joshua to cut short
rehearsal?

FRANCES
Yes.

Miles stands there like a frozen statue. Frances reads his
expression to interpret his feelings on the topic. It is
crystal clear that his mood has turned dark.

MILES
Of course, I expect you to deny it -
if the question is ever put to you.

FRANCES
If such an opportunity were to
present itself again, I fully intend
to inform all of London that *Evelina*
was written by my hand.

Miles sighs and looks down upon the footpath.

MILES
You were my saint and now my saint is
gone - gone forever.
(MORE)

MILES (cont'd)

In her place, I find not a soft, gentle girl, but a woman who has put her heart into a book.

FRANCES

Is that any different than a man who places his heart into a book?

MILES

A woman who puts her heart into a book is like a woman who disrobes in a public place. Worse, she exposes a soul that should be sacred. She becomes a gross indelicacy to the eyes of man.

FRANCES

And that is how you think of me on account of what I have done?

MILES

How can I think anything else? I told you that I loved you because you were like a child for timidity and innocence of the world. Now, I see that your womanly charm suffers by reason of you appealing to the public for money - for applause.

FRANCES

Is it not right that I should desire the same fame as any man?

MILES

If you are to have me as your husband, you must never divulge your authorship.

FRANCES

Then, sir, I respectfully decline your proposal of marriage. I release you from your commitment.

MILES

You have put your heart into a book that will one day cause your name to be tossed about freely by men. I can hear it now. Your name, which I regarded as sacred, spoken as freely as men speak the name of their Kitty Fisher - their Polly Kennedy - any number of courtesans. Just the thought of it is vulgar.

FRANCES

When I saw my book, bound in cover, I felt prouder than I have ever felt in my life.

MILES

Is it worth what you forfeited?

FRANCES

What did I lose? A singer who would gladly stoop to marry a nonentity, yet deny his love to an equal. Yes, *Evelina* is worth it and so much more.

MILES

My poor child. You can never return to your former innocence. No honorable man will have you.

FRANCES

I can bear to hear you say even that; for now, I perceive the mistake I made.

MILES

I will leave you my carriage.

FRANCES

I would rather walk.

Miles strolls away. Ominous clouds roll in and the breeze gains in intensity. Frances is alone.

INT. BURNEY FAMILY HOME - PARLOR - SAME

Charles and Hugh gaze out the window at the driving rain.

CHARLES

Do you love my daughter?

HUGH

Regrettably, I discovered it too late.

CHARLES

Miles called on me this morning. He inquired as to Frances' favorite place to go in London.

HUGH

The park.

Charles smiles.

CHARLES
Of course, you would know that.
Miles had no idea.

Hugh and Charles stand eye to eye.

CHARLES (cont'd)
Why are you still here?

INT. SHELTER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Frances stares out at the driving rain.

LIGHTNING and THUNDER!

Frances catches a glimpse of a man standing on the path. He appears to be looking around as if he lost someone. Suddenly she realizes - it is Hugh!

Frances whistles, drawing Hugh's attention.

Hugh runs to her!

FRANCES
You look like a drowned rat. What in
heaven's name are you doing here?

HUGH
Your father told me that I would find
you and -

Hugh is suddenly perplexed that Miles is not at her side.

FRANCES
I asked him to leave.

HUGH
Oh. - Oh! I see.

FRANCES
I find no sport in being the obedient
wife out of necessity. One day, I
will earn my own living doing what I
chose to do.

HUGH
There is no day better than today.

Frances appears perplexed.

HUGH (cont'd)

As soon as the rain lets up, may I suggest we travel to my office?

FRANCES

We?

HUGH

I want you to be there when I instruct the printers to set the press for a new title page crediting you with authorship of *Evelina*.

Frances gives Hugh a huge hug!

FRANCES

I will never forget this moment, even if I live to a hundred! Did Father tell you?

The rain lessens to a drizzle.

HUGH

It is his desire for all of London to celebrate your accomplishment.

FRANCES

That would be a dream come true.

HUGH

If we hurry, we can get to my carriage before the rain resumes.

FRANCES

What about your father?

HUGH

He placed me in charge, did he not?

FRANCES

Even so, fathers can be unreasonable.

HUGH

Yours came around. He has become your most fervent advocate.

FRANCES

You have worked so hard to earn your position.

HUGH

Look, Frances. The fact remains that you deserve the credit and all that comes with it. As for my situation, there are plenty of other publishing houses if my father is unwise enough to object, and I will make sure you are fairly treated wherever I go.

FRANCES

You would do this for me?

HUGH

Absolutely. Because of *Evelina*, literature will never be the same.

EXT. SHELTER HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Drizzle falls.

FRANCES

You make too much of my simple book.

HUGH

By writing your book, you have become the person your father wanted you to marry. You are a person of great importance and London will adore you.

Frances looks Hugh in the eyes.

FRANCES

What about you?

HUGH

You need not be any more than Fanny Burney to be adored by me.

Frances glows as she has never glowed before. Her face is rosy and her eyes sparkle.

Rain picks up.

FRANCES

So much for making it to your carriage before the rain resumes.

HUGH

Rain brings renewal. It washes away the old ways so that new growth may spring forth.

Hugh takes in a deep breath.

HUGH (cont'd)
 Would you like to hear how I plan to
 announce the news to my father?

Frances smiles and nods.

HUGH (cont'd)
 People speak of *Evelina* being the
 work of Mr. Walpole or Mr. Anstey or
 any man of letters. Pay no attention
 to these astute investigators. I am
 here to tell you that this book is
 the work of Miss Fanny Burney, the
 person who I love and respect with
 the entirety of my being.

Frances is speechless.

HUGH (cont'd)
 Fanny, you and your book will live so
 long as the English language has a
 literature of its own.

Hugh gazes into her eyes.

HUGH (cont'd)
 There is something I mean to ask you.

Hugh summons courage as the rain begins to pour.

FRANCES
 Out with it, before we catch our
 death.

HUGH
 May I - kiss you?

FRANCES
 You seek my permission?

HUGH
 I completely understand if you do not
 fancy me in that way.

Frances passionately kisses Hugh!

Freeze frame on a RAINDROP in the form of a crown!

EXT. PARK - ROSE GARDEN - DAY

Frances casually strolls to the rosebush. Seeing that she is alone, she stealthily retrieves a letter hidden in the rosebush. She reads the letter.

FRANCES
 (reads...)
 Meet me in the tea garden.

EXT. PARK - TEA GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Frances finds Mrs. Evans sitting with Hugh at a table set for a party of three.

Hugh pulls out a chair.

Frances grins and whispers in Hugh's ear.

FRANCES
 What is she doing here?

HUGH
 (whispers)
 Trust me.

They sit.

MRS. EVANS
 Please accept my heartfelt gratitude.
 Your *Evelina* has given us hope.

FRANCES
 It is only a book.

MRS. EVANS
 For far too long, the so-called
 respectable publishers stifled our
 voices. Your book has made it
 possible for publishers to finally
 see women as novelists of worth.

FRANCES
 You attribute too much credit to me.
 I do not stand alone. Are you not Dr.
 Johnson's trusted editor?

MRS. EVANS
 I am. However, that does not satisfy
 my dreams. I am revising the
 manuscript of my unpublished novel.

Frances glances at Hugh and he replies with a warm smile.

MRS. EVANS (cont'd)

I remember you as a shy child -
always sitting in the corner.

FRANCES

I spent many long hours looking out
from that corner.

MRS. EVANS

Two eyes looking out from a corner
with a creative mind behind them -
there you have the true writer of a
novel of life and character. - Would
you consider assisting me with my
promise of a book?

FRANCES

You honor me.

MRS. EVANS

Miss Burney, you must realize that
your book has greatly improved the
respectability of the female writer
and, in doing so, you have improved
the path for writers such as myself.
Not to mention, your romance story
will give young ladies the power of
permission.

FRANCES

Then, it was worth the effort.

GIRL

Miss Burney?

Frances, Mrs. Evans and Hugh turn around to find a WOMAN
(adult) and her GIRL (preteen). Girl is starstruck as she
gazes at Frances. Girl holds out a copy of *Evelina*!

GIRL (cont'd)

Would you please sign your book for
me?

WOMAN

She adores *Evelina*. I tried to tell
her that you have not the means to
sign her book here in the tea garden,
however she tends to ignore logic.

Hugh reaches into his messenger bag and produces a fountain
pen. He presents the fountain pen to Frances.

Frances smiles and accepts the fountain pen. She bends down to the girl's level.

FRANCES

I am honored.

Girl is all grins and giggles as Frances signs her book. Girl cradles her treasured signed copy of *Evelina*!

GIRL

Thank you, Miss Burney.

Frances returns the pen to Hugh. He does not accept it.

HUGH

It is yours. You earned it.

ON BLACK: "Based on the book *Discovering Evelina* and inspired by the life of Frances Burney - the Mother of English Fiction."

INSERT - PICTURE and NAME

Frances Burney

BACK TO SCENE

ON BLACK: "Dedicated to the many brave pioneers who made our world a better place."

FADE OUT.