MELLERSH. And what were you discussing about holidays?
LOTTY. Just that they must be nice, that's all.
MELLERSH. I'm certain they are. Although I have heard some shocking stories to the contrary. There is an inherent element of risk in holidays that colors quite nicely the sureties of home. *(Lotty thinks.)*
LOTTY. The piano needs tuning.
MELLERSH. What made you think of that?
LOTTY. I don't know. It doesn't matter. Unless you think I should tune it myself.
MELLERSH. Charlotte.
LOTTY. I'm ready, Mellersh. *(Mellersh looks up. Lotty is glowing with thrift.)*
MELLERSH. Right, then.
LOTTY. Do I look all right, Mellersh?
MELLERSH. Fine, fine. You do manage quite well with your dress allowance, my dear. Your ability with thrift is highly admirable.
LOTTY. The sureties of home.
MELLERSH. And much appreciated for it. *(He kisses two fingers and touches her nose.)*
LOTTY. Off we go, then. *(Starts to exit.)*
MELLERSH. *(Taken aback.)* Charlotte?!
LOTTY. Yes, Mellersh? *(Mellersh stares expectantly. Lotty waits, suddenly realizes.)* How silly of me. *(She goes to him, ties his tie. Mellersh thinks, quite used to being attended to.)*
MELLERSH. Do you think this Arnott is someone I should look up?
LOTTY. Oh, no. I didn't mean that. I don't know anything about him, really. I only met his wife, that's all.
MELLERSH. Well, that's very clever of you. You can make many connections for me at your ladies' club, I imagine, if you steer your conversation in a useful direction.
LOTTY. Yes, Mellersh, I'm sure. *(Mellersh thinks.)*
MELLERSH. I will miss my *Times*, Charlotte.
LOTTY. I am sorry. There shall be another tomorrow. *(Mellersh sighs with great patience. The tie is tied.)* There.
MELLERSH. Right, then. Now … *(Takes a monocle from his pocket, places it, poses.)* How do I look? *(Lotty looks him over.)*
LOTTY. Marvelous. *(Thunder.)*

FREDERICK

Scene 3

Rain. The Arnott home. A table, two chairs, a coat rack with coats and umbrellas. Frederick Arnott stands at an unseen mirror, tying his tie, preparing himself for a social engagement. He is jovial and in a party mood, singing "Ma, He's Making Eyes At Me" to himself between poses. Rose enters, returning from the club.

ROSE. *(Surprised, disapproving.)* Frederick.
FREDERICK. Rose.
ROSE. You're here.
FREDERICK. Here I am.
ROSE. And there you go, it seems. Who is it tonight?
FREDERICK. The Bacon-Cateses. A party for my new book.
ROSE. *(Coldly.)* That should be a posh set.
FREDERICK. Hurry and you can join me.
ROSE. Wouldn't that be comical. *(Frederick picks up a book and pen.)*
FREDERICK. *Madame DuBarry* has all the appearance of being my most successful book yet, even more so than *Pompadour*. The Bacon-Cateses never invited me for *Madame Pompadour*. *(He opens the book and signs.)* Sin must have taken a step up in respectability if even the Bacon-Cateses have asked for the pleasure of meeting "Mr. Florian Ayers."
ROSE. Sin cannot take a step up, Frederick. And you know how I feel about that name.
FREDERICK. *(Rolling the name off of his tongue.)* "Florian Ayers." Even you must admit that as a pen name, it is most imaginative.
ROSE. Your imagination has never been in question.
FREDERICK. Yes. Well, don't dislike that name too much, darling. When God comes to browse through my literary *oeuvre*, He'll damn "Florian Ayers" straight to Hell, but you and I shall be spared. *(He smiles. Rose does not respond.)* There was a time when you laughed at my humor, Rose. You could light up a room when you laughed.
ROSE. That was before.
FREDERICK. Before my books, you mean? My poetry never afforded charity. Your church should be thanking Madame DuBarry. Those

FREDERICK

boots you bought the schoolchildren this winter? Stout with sin.
ROSE. I didn't mean your books. *(She thinks.)* You were a good poet, Frederick. And Frederick Arnott is a good name.
FREDERICK. To whom?
ROSE. To me.
FREDERICK. Rose. I am a weak and wicked man. I wish you could forgive me that.
ROSE. You are not wicked, Frederick.
FREDERICK. You're right. "Florian Ayers" is wicked. I'm merely weak.
ROSE. It's just … one should not write books God would not like to read. *(Frederick laughs.)*
FREDERICK. Madame DuBarry has nothing over Mary Magdalene, I assure you.
ROSE. Is everything funny to you?
FREDERICK. No darling, it's not. God knows.
ROSE. Does He? We are judged by our actions, Frederick, not by our intentions.
FREDERICK. He's keeping score you say?
ROSE. Something like that.
FREDERICK. And what of those who say we are loved all the more for our … humanness? *(Rose considers.)*
ROSE. I would say that they are mistaken. *(Moving toward him.)* Here. You've muffed your tie.
FREDERICK. *(Pulling away.)* I have it. *(Rose thinks.)*
ROSE. Do you know anyone by the name of Wilton?
FREDERICK. Wilton?
ROSE. A solicitor and his wife. *(Frederick shudders.)*
FREDERICK. I make quite a point of avoiding solicitors.
ROSE. I met the wife today. A most unusual woman.
FREDERICK. *(Enthused.)* Really?
ROSE. She spoke of heaven and home.
FREDERICK. *(Disappointed.)* Oh. *(He starts to sing to himself.)*
ROSE. And of loss. She claims to see things. She said that I looked to her like a disappointed Madonna. *(Frederick pauses momentarily, thinking, resumes singing.)* What is that exactly?
FREDERICK. What is what?
ROSE. The song you're singing.
FREDERICK. Just a little jazz number I've heard. *(Sings to Rose, dancing.)* "Ma, he's making eyes at me! Ma, he's awful nice to me!"
ROSE. "Making eyes"?

FREDERICK. Yes. You know … *(He shoots her a seductive stare.)* Valentino. *(Rose finds the image a bit more appealing than she'd like.)*
ROSE. Chaplin, perhaps. *(She turns away, thinks.)* This Mrs. Wilton. She wondered how one is to go forward when so much has been lost.
FREDERICK. *(Concerned.)* Exactly what did the two of you discuss?
ROSE. Nothing specific. I'm not at all certain she heard a word I said, actually.
FREDERICK. *(Sincerely.)* Rose. My book tour lasts from the end of March through all of April. Come with me.
ROSE. *(Looking at him, moved.)* April? With you? *(Considers.)* As what? "Mrs Florian Ayers"? Really, you and Mrs. Wilton are two of a kind. *(She hands him the book.)* You don't want to miss your party.
FREDERICK. No. *(He gets his hat, starts to exit, defeated.)* Rose? Should the things you have faith in ever include the people who love you … *(He pops his hat on his head.)* … be in touch. *(Thunder.)*

Scene 4

Rain. A church. Rose is searching for something. Lotty enters, glancing over her shoulder.

LOTTY. *(Whispering loudly.)* Mrs. Arnott! Rose!
ROSE. *(Aghast.)* Mrs. Wilton!
LOTTY. I've only a moment. I told Mellersh I left my gloves in our pew.
ROSE. Lying to your husband, Mrs. Wilton, in Our Father's house?
LOTTY. Oh, but I didn't lie. I really left them, so that I wouldn't be lying. *(She retrieves her gloves. Rose looks heavenward.)* I got it, Rose! A reply to our inquiry about the castle!
ROSE. *(Sternly.)* Please. We really must talk.
LOTTY. It is most kind, from a Mr. Antony Wilding, of Knightsbridge. It smells of cinnamon!
ROSE. Cinnamon?
LOTTY. Isn't that delightful! But, brace yourself. Sixty pounds for the month of April.
ROSE. Mrs. Wilton …