

# Lord Audley's Secret

*Or The Righteous Punish'd*

A Gay Victorian Mellow Drama

By Eric Presland

## Cast

Chorus 1

Chorus 2

Chorus 3 [these can double]

Augustus

A Hero

Jed

His life's companion

Lord Audley

A Villain. His catchphrase, borrowed from Sweeney Todd, is 'I'll polish her off'. It should be distinctive.

Sweeney Todd

A barber. Can double with Augustus.

Lady Audley

A Wronged Wife

Rev Jonas Toadspawn

A Hypocrite

Tara Masalata

A Mysterious Gypsy

[or Roma for an advanced audience]

## Settings

The original production had sets and props by Neil Bartlett; they were cardboard cut-outs in the style of a Pollock's Toy Theatre.

## Time

The 1820s-1830s

Scene the First

*[The manly companions' cottage. The furniture is manly. The crockery and cutlery is manly. Even the roses round the door are manly. Over the manly fireplace is a Sampler, 'God Bless This House', in manly needlepoint.]*

CHORUS 1: In a picturesque yet retired county in the heart of rural tranquillity –

CHORUS 2: Where sturdy English Yeopersons produce sturdy English cattle, and walk the unspoilt lanes on their sturdy English legs –

CHORUS 3: with their sturdy English thighs and their sturdy English buttocks – ooh!

*[CHORUS 1 & CHORUS 2 slap CHORUS 3]*

CHORUS 1: Here where our sturdy old English customs are as yet uncorrupted by the airs and graces of the soiled metropolis –

CHORUS 2: Stands a sturdy English cottage remarkable for its air of refined manly simplicity -

CHORUS 3: and gay gentrification –

CHORUS 1: Around the manly door, manly roses entwine in bright order.

CHORUS 2: Along the path neat rows of alyssum and lobelia refresh the weary traveller with their manly fragrance -

CHORUS 3: and tell of the loving care with which they are tended.

CHORUS 1: Crossing the threshold, the bare, bright, clean rooms indicate to even the casual observer the poverty in which these virtuous folk do dwell.

CHORUS 2: But this is a proud poverty, a virtuous poverty, a manly poverty, which takes pains with the little it has.

- CHORUS 3: The curtains are neat –
- CHORUS 1: - and manly. Don't forget manly.
- CHORUS 2: - and well-worn with washing, and through them the Spring sunshine streams encouragingly, for fair Nature doth bless impartially both rich and poor alike.
- CHORUS 3: Over the sacred manly hearth, a pious texts exhorts the household to do each day its duty, and expresses a heartfelt prayer –
- CHORUS 1: - and manly
- CHORUS 2: Oh, do shut up
- CHORUS 3: - to th'Omnipotent deity who watches over them:
- CHORUS 1: "God bless this manly house."
- CHORUS 2: Though they need no promptings more than the urging of their hearts – manly hearts, okay? Jesus!
- CHORUS 3: On the table, a simple loaf and jug of milk: remains of their frugal repast –
- CHORUS 1: While at that hearth three chairs are drawn up before a small fire, for the Sun is not so kind as to entirely banish winter chills.
- CHORUS 2: One chair lies empty, the oldest and most worn of the three.
- CHORUS 3: Which betokens one user of long standing, now absent.
- CHORUS 1: Whilst in the other two sit - Augustus

*[AUGUSTUS enters and sits, very manly and upright]*

- And Jed, with furrowed brow

*[JED sits posed, worried, like The Thinker]*

- Which shows that all is not well with these two upright  
—

CHORUS 2: - and manly —

CHORUS 1: young men.

JED: Thou knowst, fair Augustus, that it is two long years since Mother died.

AUGUSTUS: Ay.

JED: Oft-times do I look upon her chair, or her teeth upon the mantelpiece, and mind me of the happy hours she dandled me upon her knee.

AUGUSTUS: Ay.

JED: I still bear the scars on my behind. Very bony knees she did have. And sharp.

AUGUSTUS: Ay.

JED: Alas, no more. The cares and toils of poverty did send her untimely to her grave.

AUGUSTUS: Ay.

JED: Yet died she in the bosom of her doting son, and in the consolation of her Religion. Tis comfort to me. Also to know that she knew that I was happy with thee. I had found my helpmeet and most faithful friend who would travel this, life's dirt track, with me.

Hand in hand, shoulder to shoulder, thigh to thigh,  
knee to knee, matching stride for stride.

AUGUSTUS: Ay.

JED: I knew this though I had but met thee the day before she died. I knew, and she knew, and I knew that she knew, and she knew that I knew she knew. 'Twas a great comfort. *[Aside]* But oh, under what mystery did our meeting take place. I long to know the secrets of Augustus' shadowy past. *[To AUGUSTUS]* I say, it was a great comfort.

AUGUSTUS: Ay. *[Pause]*

JED: Thou art in a chatty mood tonight, dear Augustus.

AUGUSTUS: Ay.

JED: There is no force so powerful as a MOTHER's love – or that of a faithful friend.

AUGUSTUS: Ay. I mean – what?

JED: Thou hast not heard aught of what I said.

AUGUSTUS: Nay, dear Jed, I hang on every word that drips from thy cherry –

JED: But manly –

AUGUSTUS: - manly yes, lips. I do so doat on thee. *[Aside]* I dare not tell him what is truly on my mind.

JED: Fret not, dear Friend. Thou hast had a hard day of it, toiling in our simple plot, harvesting the simple weeds with which we augment our daily bread.

AUGUSTUS: That's it. My massive delts, gluts and abs are but a little tired from my labours. *[Aside]* Oh, how I hate to dissemble thus to my dear one. But tis stern NECESSITY that drives me.

JED: Sometimes I wonder whether thou dost regret the life that thou has chosen here with me.

AUGUSTUS: *[Loud]* Never!

*[JED winces and massages his ear.]*

JED: But I am rough, uncouth. Thou are a gentleman.

AUGUSTUS: I know not.

JED: Thou art. Thy manner and thy speech proclaims as much. Thy hands, now calloused from the space, were soft and dainty when thou camest to me. The l'Oreal moisturiser in thy pocket confirmed as much. Thou hast had servants to tend thee ere now, I warrant.

AUGUSTUS: *[Agitated]* Nay, I know not, I tell thee. Thou knowst that when thou didst find me, bleeding and unconscious in the wood, swooning and nigh almost to death, thou did'st rescue me even from its very jaws. Thy sweet face, the first that I set eyes on when I awoke, did revive me more than any balm prescribed by doctor could. Yet how I came thus in the woods, and in that state, I know not.

JED: Amnesia.

AUGUSTUS: Nor do I know why I had that parrot on my shoulder.

JED: Polly-nesia

- AUGUSTUS: My mind is blank. Nor will any memory of life ere I met thee return.
- JED: Thou art highborn. I'll lay my life on it.
- AUGUSTUS: No more of this; 'tis pointless to speculate thus.
- JED: *[Aside]* Thus is he ever when we talk of this. *[To AUGUSTUS]* Calm thee. Read this copy of *The Manly Weekly* to soothe thy nerves.
- AUGUSTUS: I have lost all taste for periodicals.
- JED: Ah! Mag-nesia! Oh, Augustus. How I hate it when we quarrel thus.
- AUGUSTUS: Fear not. Tis past. *[They kiss a manly kiss.]*
- JED: Rest thee there beside the fire. I will take care of thee. I'll make a dish of tea from the roots of stinking nightshade.
- AUGUSTUS: Mm! Lovely! *[JED exits]*
- AUGUSTUS: Oh how my head doth ache. This talk of my past doth ever take me so. How I wish Jed would not talk of it, though he longs to plumb the depths of my mystery. He likes to plumb my depths in any case. But I am powerless to help him. And now this other woe doth crowd upon our bliss. *[He produces a letter.]* Here do I have heavy tidings indeed. A notice of EVICTION! This cottage is to be sold over our very heads. Tis true! And this despite the firm promise which Lord Audley – are you following this? – did give to Jed's revered though mentally challenged mother; that this cottage would always remain part of his estate whilst she and Jed did live. He shook hands with Jed upon the matter before this very fire. I have heard him say so often.

But alas, Old Lord Audley too has passed away, despatched by some untimely radishes, and leaving the estate in the hands of Young Lord Audley. He brings with him his fine London ways and his fine London manners [*encourage boos*] and all the foppery of the town – aye, and a fine London head for business. Why should he heed his father's promise to his dying mother, when he can sell the roof over our heads and make a princely fortune, thanks to the massive rise in house prices due to the introduction of the Stagecoach?

Tis true, the rent is somewhat overdue. The weed harvest has been bad this year. But I have been frugal; I have saved half the sum that is owing. I will take the money to Lord Audley. Perhaps it will soften his hard heart. I have but faint hope of the enterprise, but I must take this desperate step. Meanwhile, - Shhh! Not a word of this business to Jed. It will break his fond heart to leave his childhood home, and memories of domestic bliss so dear.

*[Re-enter JED]*

JED: I have made thee a fine strong psychotropic brew.

AUGUSTUS: Thank you, dear Jed, but I feel much better.

JED: Rest awhile and regain thy strength.

AUGUSTUS: Now that I do think on't, I fancy that a walk would compose my mind. The air in here is stifling.

JED: I will chip away the mud that blocks one of the holes in the wall.

AUGUSTUS: I will be glad when we can afford windows. Do not exercise yourself, dear Jed. A walk will do the trick.

Put the stinking nightshade on the hob, to warm against my return. Oh Jed, thou hast been so kind to me.

JED: I obey but the promptings of my heart. Dear Augustus.

AUGUSTUS: Dear Jed. *[They kiss]* And now to work – I mean, to walk. Farewell!

JED: I shall wait thy return with expectant heart and lips.

*[AUGUSTUS exits]*

JED: These strange moods come upon him sometimes, and I must bear with them. This one too will be over soon.

**BLACKOUT**

Scene The Second

*[The fine grounds of Audley Hall, Palladian villa of Lord and Lady Audley. Carefully tended and well-behaved elms line a path. Classical statuary is strategically placed.]*

CHORUS 1: Even in our rural retreats, we have our rich and poor

CHORUS 2: - each knowing his place

CHORUS 3: And the place of Lord and Lady Audley is Audley Hall.

CHORUS 1: A fine imposing house with East Wing and West Wing  
of the last century

CHORUS 2: The frontage, adorned with gracious pillars, looks out  
on an orderly park, the work of Incontinence Brown –

CHORUS 3: Nature to advantage dresses, with careful clumps of  
trees to provide a grateful shade

CHORUS 1: While artful streams murmur to beguile the ear.

*[FX: Murmur, murmur, murmur, murmur]*

CHORUS 2: As Jed and Augustus eke out a meagre repast of  
bread and weeds -

CHORUS 3: the board of Lord and Lady Audley groans –

*[BOARD: Groan]*

CHORUS 3: with sides of beef, poultry, game and exotic oriental  
fruits –

CHORUS 1: while decanters stand in rows upon the side, offering  
fermented grape in all its myriad variety.

CHORUS 2: But Lord and Lady Audley are, on occasion, generous, and today provide a feast for all the visitors.

*[Theme tune from the Archers "Barwick Green". The Villagers perform a Morris dance. The dance comes to an end.]*

LORD AUDLEY: A splendid dance indeed.

VILLAGER 1: We have been practising a month, my Lord.

LORD AUDLEY: And excellently fleet of foot it was too. Don't you think so, my dear?

LADY AUDLEY: Indeed, dear husband. These simple country folk have skills our uncouth townspeople wot not of. And they are all in such rude good health!

*[VILLAGER 1 farts]*

LADY AUDLEY: Very rude good health.

LORD AUDLEY: They have exerted themselves to the utmost. *[Aside]* They know that I will evict them all if they don't.

LADY AUDLEY: Indeed, they have truly bust their digestive systems. *[Aside]* I am far too ladylike to say 'guts'. *[To LORD AUDLEY]* Look, dear husband, that one's tugging his forelock so hard that it's dropped off.

LORD AUDLEY: This dancing must have worked up all your appetites. Go you now to the feasting and set to. There's roast pig and a side of beef and Ostrich on a stick. Thank you, Whipsnade.

LADY AUDLEY: Washed down by the finest Chateau Latour '24.

VILLAGER 1: Oh, don't hold with all that foreign muck.

VILLAGER 2: It been trampled by filthy French feet.

LADY AUDLEY: But it's 1824!

VILLAGER 3: Then it's way past its sell-by date.

VILLAGER 1: Can't we have some of that lovely new-fangled brew from the penal colonies? Cocoa Koala.

VILLAGERS: Ay.

LORD AUDLEY: Ungrateful whelps! In that case you shall have ditch water and like it.

VILLAGER 1: Oh, lovely.

VILLAGER 2: Ditch water – a real treat that is.

VILLAGER 3: Thank `ee, thank `ee my lord.

*[They exit, bowing and tugging their remaining forelocks.]*

LADY AUDLEY: Two years we have been married. How quickly time doth fleet for the enraptured.

LORD AUDLEY: Two years indeed. Why it seems but yesterday that I was in your fine town house in Cheyne Walk, on my knees before thee, requesting thy hand in marriage. *[Aside]* And making my way to a fortune!

LADY AUDLEY: Thine eye was full of such fine sparkle

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* That was the champagne.

LADY AUDLEY: Thy demeanour held such manly ardour; how was I to refuse?

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* My ardour was all to secure the thousands she would bring in dowry and save my family fortunes. I thought with marriage I would take all, for under

English law all property of a wife reverts to the husband; a woman has no rights. But after the wedding, I discovered that her cunning father had tied up all her land and funds in an entailment. I cannot touch them. Curses! And yet, if she were to die, I as husband would inherit all...

LADY AUDLEY: Whom dost thou talk to, dearest?

LORD AUDLEY: Sometimes I sense we are in the presence of an invisible audience.

LADY AUDLEY: How strange! I thought the same. But it cannot be, for they are silent as the tomb.

LORD AUDLEY: Thou wast recalling our courtship, dearest?

LADY AUDLEY: You swept aside all weak womanly scruples.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* To escape debtors' prison I would have swept aside more than that.

LADY AUDLEY: Hast though been happy, Robert? Truly, madly, deeply happy?

LORD AUDLEY: As happy as any man can hope to be with any wife. *[Aside]* That is to say, not at all. I shall polish her off as soon as I can devise a plan. *[Boos]*

LADY AUDLEY: When I came first from London, I must confess my heart misgave me. I feared for my delicate maiden sensibilities – don't laugh – exposed to rough country manners. But I find that these people have such natural, unaffected goodness in their hearts that they need no polishing with the etiquette of polite society.

LORD AUDLEY: They are simple people. *[Aside]* Very simple people. Veritable simpletons, in fact. None of them suspects a thing – ha! Ha!

- LADY AUDLEY: I feel I have won myself a place in their simple country affections, with my visits to them armed with possets and health-giving curds.
- LORD AUDLEY: Your possets are admired across the county, though I fear they have dumped curds in most inconvenient and unhygienic places.
- LADY AUDLEY: And now I feel they love me.
- LORD AUDLEY: They do indeed. *[Aside]* Curse the woman. The place she has won will not be easy to dislodge her from. *[To LADY AUDLEY]* You are truly the crown and ornament of our little kingdom.
- LADY AUDLEY: I have come to love our kingdom so. I feel as if I have always known Audley Hall, and my home has always been in Much Audley. *[She starts]* But here comes that vile man, the Reverend Jonas Toadspaw. I know not what it is, but there is something about him which makes my flesh creep.
- LORD AUDLEY: What is this, Aurora? The Reverend Toadspaw is an upright and godly man who has done great good improving the morals of the village. He has persuaded many a wayward young man to become upright.
- LADY AUDLEY: I know it is foolish. But I cannot face him on this our anniversary. He will cast his blighted shadow o'er our sun.
- LORD AUDLEY: Enough of these foolish fancies. Today we must be charitable to all. *[Aside]* All except you, my love.
- LADY AUDLEY: Forgive me, but I cannot bear him. Make my excuses, I pray you.

*[LADY AUDLEY exits through the parterre.]*

LORD AUDLEY: Bah! A fig for her! The righteous humbug who is coming through my box will further my plan to polish her off. He is worldly and ambitious, for all his cant, and I can turn him to my purpose. The status of the House of Audley will be enough to advance him. My patronage, and my voice in the ear of the Bishop of Cannock will persuade him to do almost anything.

*[Enter Rev JONAS TOADSPAWN. Boos.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: A blessing on my flock. Peace be amongst thee,

*[He presses his benediction on a reluctant audience. He has very bad, gin-sodden breath.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: And on thee, my dear, dear Lord Audley. See how the lord showers benisons in the path of he who walks in the sight of the ALMIGHTY. For thee HE hath ordained thy lovely deer park. The benison of venison, you might say. Heh-heh-heh. *[He has the most appalling laugh.]* For thee he hath killed the fatted calf, for thee he hath turned the water into wine. He hath increased thy talents one hundredfold, showing his care with pearls beyond price, which the ungodly call twenty thousand a year plus a hundred thousand in the Funds.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* All, alas, mortgaged and squandered on playing Happy Family for money amongst a gang of ruthless rakes. Mr Bun the Baker is the ruin of me. *[To REV T.]* I am indeed a fortunate man.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: And how is the delightful Lady Audley. Verily her image shines as if sprayed with Pledge, like the angel which appeared unto Samuel in a dream.

LORD AUDLEY: She has been taken a trifle ill. The heat...

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Ah, these women are but frail vessels.

LORD AUDLEY: Enough of this. Did you deliver the message as I asked?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Verily, not Gabriel speeding to the Virgin Mary could have sped more swift than I. But 'tis thirsty work; my throat is parched, my brow decked with that exudation which the ungodly term 'sweat'. Excuse me while I sip some wholesome cordial which was made for me by a grateful old parishioner in her garden distillery.

*[He produces a hip flask labelled 'Gin'. He swigs from it, belches loudly.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Ah, the wholesome belch is a shield against contagious fevers.

LORD AUDLEY: You don't have any fever.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: That just proves how well it works.

*[He takes another swig.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: For the chest....

LORD AUDLEY: And how did they receive it?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Receive what?

LORD AUDLEY: The notice of eviction. I must have them out by the end of the month. Lord Scratchwood has promised me £500 for immediate vacant possession. *[Aside]* 'Tis not much, but 'twill stem the rising tide of bankruptcy for a short while.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I know not. The cottage was deserted. I do not like to linger there. It is the dwelling of the unrighteous. Young men who have steeped themselves in

unnatural vice, and will not heed the call to repentance, despite the very reasonable rates offered for exorcism. Once I did remonstrate with them, and they but laughed. They are too far steeped in sin to shake it off, and now they must receive their proper punishment. They must be boiled in oil, flayed alive, castrated, drawn and quartered and suffer endless eternal torment.

LORD AUDLEY: So merciful? You are a man of God indeed. I shall mention your services to me when next I dine with the Bishop of Cannock.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Your lordship is too kind. I do but do the Lord's work. *[Aside]* And I shall be revenged on that upstart Augustus Manleigh, who did mock me. *[To LORD AUDLEY]* And if there is any other service which I can do Your Lordship, do but Ask, And It Shall Be Given. Seek, and Ye Shall Find. If but my weak body can bear the charge. But I find that I am faint with my exertions.

*[He takes another pull from the flask of gin.]*

LORD AUDLEY: Come, good Jonas – may I call you that?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Your lordship does me too much honour.

LORD AUDLEY: Excellent – Jonas. You must share in the feast and celebrations, for this is our anniversary. Go in, I pray, and join the villagers. You'll find there's nothing lacking.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: In moderation. I find nothing in the Good Book to prohibit us from enjoying the fruits of GOD's good earth. *[He finishes the flask with a huge immoderate swig.]* I shall partake of the flesh of the Gadarene swine which heathens term roast pork. Just a small slice or two, with a side serving from the fruit of the

tree of knowledge, vulgarly called apple. And maybe a little crackling. It will be sufficient.

LORD AUDLEY: And there is ale too, by the gallon.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Ale, d'you say? Nay drunkenness is a beastly vice; I abhor it more than any other. Yet it is written, take a little wine for thy stomach's sake. And I do have a very bad stomach. You have convinced me.

*[They exit. Enter AUGUSTUS.]*

AUGUSTUS: There is something about this place which makes my heart uneasy. Yet it is strangely familiar... No matter, I must haste to find Lord Audley. I shall throw myself and Jed upon his mercy, and hope that I may soften his heart. Perhaps this silver which I have saved will do the trick. But hark! I hear the sound of revelry. Perhaps 'tis some special celebration. Mayhap Lord Audley will be in festive mood. I must haste to catch him.

*[Enter TARA MASALATA, a Mysterious Gypsy/Roma]*

TARA MASALATA: Alms, alms. Young sir, I beg you. Throw your alms around me. I want to get lost in your alms. Take pity on a poor old gypsy – or Roma – woman who roams around the countryside making terrible jokes and bringing good fortune on all who aid her. Alms! Alms! I have a small tribe to support.

AUGUSTUS: My dear good woman, I fear you ask the wrong person. I live in a humble cottage three miles from here. Jed – the dear friend with whom I share my days – Jed and I have but a small patch of weeds. Our landlord is about to cast us out onto the cruel world, to wander we know not where. All that I have in the world is in this purse, which I am about to offer him, in the hope that it will melt him from his

purpose. *[To audience]* You know all that of course. I ask your forbearance, cos this gypsy/Roma woman don't know jackshit.

TARA MASALATA: Nay, I can see from thy face that thou art honest. I would not take from one as poor as I am. Here, have a clothes peg.

AUGUSTUS: A clothes peg? I have wanted a clothes peg all my life! Now all I need is some clothes... But I thank thee.

TARA MASALATA: Let me see thy hand.

AUGUSTUS: My hand?

TARA MASALATA: Thy hand.

AUGUSTUS: I heard thee the first time.

TARA MASALATA: In thy hand is written thy past and thy future. Tara Masalata sees all.

AUGUSTUS: Tara Masalata? What a strange name. There is something fishy about it.

TARA MASALATA: When I was taken in by gypsies/Roma, they gave me that name for starters.

AUGUSTUS: My past is shrouded in mystery. When I arrived in Much Audley all memory of my previous life was taken from me. I was attacked...

TARA MASALATA: Let me see... *[She takes his hand]* Thou hast fallen from a great height. He who was once proud is now brought down, and he who is now high shall also fall. Beware the well. Beware... beware

*[She shakes her head wildly]*

The reception here is bloody awful. Ah, that's better. Beware the well, beware the cloth, beware treachery and weasel words. I see doom, disaster, ruin! But don't worry, it'll all turn out for the best.

AUGUSTUS: Thank you.

TARA MASALATA: Don't mention it. I have second sight, which even now tells me that I must bugger off sharpish. One comes who does not wish me well. Farewell. Farewell. Till we meet again, farewell.

*[TARA MASALATA exits.]*

AUGUSTUS: What a strange crone is this. What am I to make of what she said? "One who does not wish me well"... I wonder where he could be.

CHORUS 2: He's behind you!

CHORUS 3: Cheap!

AUGUSTUS: Here comes Lord Audley! I can tell him by his likeness to the lithograph of his father which Jed's mother kept upon the mantle shelf. That is very convenient, otherwise I would not have known him from Adam and might well have accosted the wrong person. I shall be bold and approach him. Be resolute, Augustus, and strive to live up to thy Manleigh name.

*[Enter LORD AUDLEY]*

LORD AUDLEY: That drunken Anglican sot is safely disposed between two plump dairymaids. I can forget him awhile. I need peace to think out my plans. I must be rid of Aurora – *[To Audience]* my wife is called Aurora, in case you'd forgotten. Do keep up. But how to polish

her off? 'Tis a pretty problem, but one I think in which I may count on Toadspawn's help.

*[AUGUSTUS steps forward]*

LORD AUDLEY: You!

AUGUSTUS: Lord Audley, I presume.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* He does not know me.

AUGUSTUS: My name is Augustus Manleigh. I am co-tenant with Jed Burke of Cosy Cottage, from which you would harshly hurl us into a cruel world.

LORD AUDLEY: Ay, that would I. It is my property, and I will do with it as I think fit. Not for nothing do we have a Conservative government.

AUGUSTUS: You would break your father's word to a dying woman? His solemn word?

LORD AUDLEY: He was a besotted old fool. His word does not bind me.

AUGUSTUS: He cared for thee, brought thee up, sent thee to Eton  
—

LORD AUDLEY: Just one more thing to hold against him.

AUGUSTUS: He left thee his fortune.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* A fortune squandered on lovely lovely vice.

AUGUSTUS: It was his dying wish that Jed and his mother should be left in peace and security.

LORD AUDLEY: Do not remind me.

AUGUSTUS: Just a bit of recapping.

LORD AUDLEY: Ay, Jed and his mother. But not thee. He did not know of thee. He did not know that thou wouldst lead Jed into committing acts of sodomitic lust, for which men still can hang. Jed and Augustus! Like Pratt and Smith, the names have become a byword across the county for unmentionable crimes. Abominations!

AUGUSTUS: All the village knows us for what we are. And we are proud of it!

LORD AUDLEY: Ay, Satan was a proud angel too.

AUGUSTUS: If pleas for mercy cannot move thee, perhaps this can.

*[He produces the purse]*

AUGUSTUS: Thou knowst that we have six months' arrears in rent. The weed harvest has been bad. But yet we have saved this – three months' rent. Thou shalt have the rest within the month. How, I know not... but we shall find it. This is proof of our honest intent.

LORD AUDLEY: Let me see.

*[He takes the money. As he counts:]*

AUGUSTUS: Something tells me I have seen this man before. Where, I cannot tell... memories are crowding to my brain. Are they memories, or fancies merely? But something stirs... something from my past life... I remember a bed, a vile cot in a stinking hovel of an Inn... It was called... Travelodge.

LORD AUDLEY: He has forgotten. But how long will he forget? The instant he recalls, he may expose me, and I shall be ruined. There's nothing for it. I shall have to polish him off too! And what is more, I see the means to do't. [*To AUGUSTUS*] Thou art right. This is exactly three months' rent. I see I was mistaken, and thou hast honest intentions, despite thy – eccentric – affections. I will think on this. Meet me in ten minutes by the Old Well in Lime Tree Walk; I will see if I can devise some stay of execution, whereby Lord Scratchwood's plans may be deferred. Meanwhile, think of some means whereby you can repay the rest. But now I must return a while to the revels.

AUGUSTUS: I thank thee, Lord Audley, from the bottom of my honest Manleigh heart,

LORD AUDLEY: You must excuse me.

AUGUSTUS: Your servant, sir.

*[LORD AUDLEY exits]*

AUGUSTUS: I have won stay of execution. But I fear this but postpones the evil hour. Where shall I raise the money? I know I could raise it down in London on the Dilly, but I would not stoop to trade my favours thus. The only game that interests me is the manly sport of shove ha'penny. I fear I shall have to tell my Jed ere long.

*[Re-enter TARA MASALATA]*

TARA MASALATA: Why so downcast, young sir?

AUGUSTUS: I fear I have but stayed Lord Audley's hand. I cannot think where to raise the rest of the money owing.

- TARA MASALATA: A young man such as thou art hast always something to sell.
- AUGUSTUS: Never! I would not tarnish my love for Jed in so vile a fashion.
- TARA MASALATA: Don't be so picky, young man. We are members of two despised races, thee and me. Neither of us will ever get into the Ascot Royal Enclosure. In this wicked world we must know our friends and shift for ourselves as best we can.
- AUGUSTUS: Perhaps thou art right.
- TARA MASALATA: Of course I'm right. I'm always right. It's one of my most irritating features. Tara Masalata knows all.
- AUGUSTUS: Really? Then what's the capital of the Cook Islands?
- TARA MASALATA: Avarua.
- AUGUSTUS: Thou hast convinced me. *[Idea!]* I know, I shall away to sea, so I will not be tempted to soil my body. There's booty to be won, and prizes and glory. In six months I shall come home laden with gold and pearls. And a good pension. But oh, to be parted from my Jed for so long...
- TARA MASALATA: Have it thine own way. I'd sell my body, given the choice. Cannons do nasty messy things, like take off legs.
- AUGUSTUS: I will think on't. Meantime I must haste to meet Lord Audley. The day is not let lost. I thank thee, dear kind gypsy/Roma. You have put new heart in me.
- TARA MASALATA: Think nothing of it. I do it all the time. It's all part of Customer Service. Where are you meeting Lord Audley?

AUGUSTUS: By the Old Well.

TARA MASALATA: Not – the Old Well!

AUGUSTUS: That's what I just said.

TARA MASALATA: I thought that's what you said. Beware the well!  
Beware the well!

AUGUSTUS: But the well is dry. It has been boarded up for years.

TARA MASALATA: I'm sorry, I don't know what came over me. I get these turns sometimes. The well, you say?

AUGUSTUS: And I must haste. I must not keep Lord Audley waiting.

*[AUGUSTUS exits]*

TARA MASALATA: Now it is time to throw off my disguise and work to my revenge. Little does anyone know that underneath the cloak of an old gypsy/Roma woman lurks –

*[She throws off her cloak]*

- another old gypsy/Roma woman. It is a subtle bluff, so subtle that no-one has ever seen through it. Sometimes I even fool myself. Five years ago it was, but I will always remember it as if 'twere yesterday. Our tents were pitched upon Hampstead Heath, ready for the grand Michaelmas Fair and badger races. I was practising the cards for my fortune telling, with my fair love, the beauteous Tzatziki by my side. She was drugging the goldfish for the roll-a-penny; it's a kindness really, they're highly strung. Suddenly – A COMMOTION! A gang of young bloods came rushing through the tents. They thought it fun

to strike terror into a few helpless gypsy/Roma. One of them, drunker and more inflamed than the rest – are you following this? – drunker and more inflamed than the rest, tripped over the rope of our tent.

CHORUS 2: Guy?

TARA MASALATA: Unless it was a drag king. He knocked into the sailcloth. He upset our small oil lamp. It went over in a trice. In seconds the tent was a seething mass of flames. I beat at them in vain. I tried to drag Tzatziki from their path, but I was overpowered by heat and smoke. I would not have escaped myself, were it not for a passing Giantess, who carried me bodily from the furnace. I shall not easily forget the sound of Tzatziki's screams. A slow and awful death.

The gallants, the rakehells, escaped in the confusion. The Tribe was too occupied bringing water from the Ponds to quench the fires. But I saw the face of the murderer. Only a glimpse, but it was enough. And I have tracked him down. For five long years I have searched, enquired, and eliminated. My Track and Trace has been an object lesson. And I know him for who he is. The trail has led me here, to Audley Hall and – LORD AUDLEY!

*[To the Audience]* You still with me? Don't worry, there's not much more. *[She produces a pistol]* I have two bullets, one for him and one for me. Once I have avenged my beloved, my life's work is done. But I will not kill him yet. That would be too quick, too easy. I shall kill him, yes. But first I shall see him humbled, ruined and disgraced. Tara Masalata's curse on Audley, and all the Tribe of Audley.

*[Enter TOADSPAWN drunk.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[sings]* Here's to the jolly rum

I love it in my tum;  
 They call me a 'drunken sot',  
 Though I maintain I'm not.  
 I only have a little drop,  
 And then a drop, and then a drop  
 It's hard to know just when to stop  
 Drinking the jolly rum.

*[Seeing TARA MASALATA]* Ah, fair sister. I see thou art of the Lost Tribe of Israel. Verily, nor Jezebel nor Susannah was more fair. Come, thou shalt drink with me.

TARA MASALATA: That will I not. Thou art nought but an old sponge.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Ah, but a sponge hath its uses. *[Lecherous]* How'd you like me to give you a good rub-down?

TARA MASALATA: Away, foul amphibian!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Come, come. A little drop will do no harm. For charity and company's sake. I see thou hast a kindly heart.

*[He takes a swig from his flask. It is empty.]*

Empty! Gone! Perfidious, ungodly flask.  
 Treacherous as Delilah. Begone!

*[He throws it away, then thinks again.]*

Nay I shall not reproach thee. 'Tis not thy doing.  
 Shall I strike thee with my rod as Moses did the rock  
 in Canaan, and make thee flow again with nectar?  
 Or shall I take thee back to the offie and get  
 sixpence on the empty?

TARA MASALATA: Hast thou not had enough?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Enough? Never! But there are other things which can divert the mind of the philosopher. Come, wench, and talk to me of the consolations preferred by the fairer sex.

TARA MASALATA: *[Aside]* His breath stinks of the rawest spirit that ever were made.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Just one kiss. Oh, but thy fair lips do drive a man wild.

TARA MASALATA: Thou art too bold, sir!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Blame not me, when 'tis thy beauty which provokes men so.

TARA MASALATA: Unhand me!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Come. A gypsy –

TARA MASALATA: Roma!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: - should not be so particular.

TARA MASALATA: Insult not my Tribe, or it shall be the worse for thee.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Nay, if thou wilt not consent, then I shall have to force thee –

TARA MASALATA: Stay, wretch, or thou shalt rue it.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I shall teach thee to be more docile in future.

TARA MASALATA: I shall defend my honour as a tigress doth her cubs.

*[She gets him in a judo hold and throws him spectacularly.]*

TARA MASALATA: I give thanks to the merciful HEAVENS for Islington's Lesbian Self-Defence Classes. 'Twas there of an evening I learnt these martial arts.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Harlot! Whore of Babylon! I shall be revenged on thee.

TARA MASALATA: Come on, then. Try it. Make my day, punk. *[To AUDIENCE]* He roars but there's no hurt in him. And I must follow the path to Lord Audley, in search of my revenge. An assassin's work is never done.

*[Exit TARA MASALATA]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: The dogs shall lick my blood! Painted Jezebel! Deceitful vile vessel of sin! I'll set the Parish Watch on thee. I shall have thee yet!

**BLACKOUT**

Scene Three

*[A clearing near the Old Well, in a grove of Lime Trees.]*

CHORUS 1: The broad paths narrow to sinuous tracks

CHORUS 2: The lime trees cluster thick, the undergrowth rises –

CHORUS 3: As Augustus, with beating heart, presses with all haste towards his appointment.

CHORUS 1: But Lord Audley is in advance of him. Not for nothing has he chosen this old neglected corner of his estate.

CHORUS 2: Here he prepares the fiendish trap to spring on the unsuspecting Augustus

CHORUS 3: With which to despatch to the OTHER WORLD.

LORD AUDLEY: 'Tis done! The hatch is off the well. The handle is concealed. That young fool will suspect nothing, so eager is he to save the paltry roof over his wretched head and that of his catamite. Thus shall my haunted years be brought to an end, and my past life buried – FOR EVER! In this secluded glade, no-one can overlook us. Here no-one will think to search. No accusing spectre can rise up to point the finger. I shall be secure in my marriage to Aurora; or, should I say, to Aurora's fortune! Ha! Ha! Ha! For once I am free, I shall polish her off! Untrammelled by any show of duty or love to the besotted girl.

CHORUS 2: *[Sarcastic]* Girl!

LORD AUDLEY: He comes.

*[Enter AUGUSTUS]*

AUGUSTUS: These woods get thicker and thicker. Truly this is a desolate place in which to make an assignation. Even the birds are silent. But I suspect nothing, so eager am I to save my paltry roof.

LORD AUDLEY: *[To Audience]* What did I tell you?

AUGUSTUS: *[Seeing LORD AUDLEY]* Sir, am I behind time?

LORD AUDLEY: Nay, sir, I am ahead.

AUGUSTUS: *[Aside]* Why is that voice so familiar?

LORD AUDLEY: Well, to business. I have considered the matter carefully

AUGUSTUS: Yes?

LORD AUDLEY: Looked at it from all sides –

AUGUSTUS: Yes?

LORD AUDLEY: To try and cast it in the most sympathetic light

AUGUSTUS: Yes?

LORD AUDLEY: And –

AUGUSTUS: Yes?

LORD AUDLEY: I cannot grant what thou askest, thou sad but undeniably attractive loser. 'Tis too risky. There is no way thou canst guarantee to repay the money owing.

AUGUSTUS: The heavens forbend! Good sir, I am on bended knees.

LORD AUDLEY: A common enough position for thy kind.

- AUGUSTUS: If it be that money is the obstacle, I have devised a plan. I shall go to be a sailor, and all such booty as I shall win, I undertake to send thee, in payment of my debt.
- LORD AUDLEY: It is not enough; no more.
- AUGUSTUS: If money may not move thee, let me talk to thee of love. Yes, LOVE! My love for Jed, and his for me. These tender devotions, grown from his care of me... care of me.... *[Aside]* It returns. I have knelt like this before – do not titter – and begged mercy from this strange man...
- LORD AUDLEY: He knows!
- AUGUSTUS: And 'twas on this very spot... the well...
- LORD AUDLEY: I am unmasked! Well then, his doom is sealed.
- AUGUSTUS: Thou art not Lord Audley! Thou art – Sir Watford Gap! That is the name I knew thee by. I thought though wast in service!
- LORD AUDLEY: Thou liest!
- AUGUSTUS: Nay, I should never forget thee again! That blow you gave me – *[to the AUDIENCE]* To-The-Head – took away my powers of recollection. But they return.
- LORD AUDLEY: Thou ravest!
- AUGUSTUS: Young rakehell, when I first met thee five long years ago, thou wast fair and young, before thy debauchery and lack of moisturising had aged thee thus. I believed in thee, loved thee, followed thee in thy drunkenness into every gambling den in

London. There were no arts of villainy I did not learn from thee. But still I loved thee. Until one day thou didst vanish. Howling with loss, I flung myself still more into the life that thou did show me. My money all was spent. I found more. I owed it to my friends Mr Barclay and Mr Lloyd. Still it did not suffice. I – cheated at cards. I was found out, and fled to the mean, anonymous streets of Wapping and Whitechapel. I eked out a miserable existence, picking pockets, turning trickster, cudgelling and cozening. A half-man living a half-existence. I was known as the Artful Dodger, but I was lucky, so I became the Artful Jammy Dodger.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Softly]* Until the day I wrote thee from Audley Hall.

AUGUSTUS: Thou didst say that urgent reasons of state had forced thee to disappear, but fortune had smiled on thee, and now we could be reunited. Only I should come to Audley Hall, and all would be made plain.

LORD AUDLEY: My life was desperate. My father, driven to despair by my ways, threatened to disinherit me. My debts too were mounting. I would shortly be arraigned before the courts. Prison doors gaped before me. The only way out – a rich wife. I wooed and won Aurora – oh how NECESSITY lent me dissembling arts! We were to be married. My father was overjoyed and we were reconciled. Only after his death did I learn that my inheritance was hollow. Unwise investments in a South Sea Bubble Bath had robbed me of all. All I had was a title, a semi-derelict hall, a bankrupt estate and no means to maintain my position in society.

AUGUSTUS: Overjoyed I read thy letter. I flew to be reunited with thee. When I arrived at this village, I received word to meet thee by the Old Well in Lime Tree Walk – this very spot!

- LORD AUDLEY: Thou wert all that stood between me and the resolution of all my woes. My infamous past, should it come out, would yet be my undoing. I had to silence thee. But I was surprised –
- AUGUSTUS: Not half so surprised as I was! You didst leave me bleeding fatally, and bleeding angry to boot. Thou didst leave me in the woods here, where Jed did find me.
- LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* How my past doth catch up on me. I must dissemble.
- AUGUSTUS: Fear not. I have no claim on thee, for through thee I did find my soul mate and my life's companion. Only let us live in peace, in the home that we have made.
- LORD AUDLEY: And if I will not?
- AUGUSTUS: Then all the world will know the treachery thou hast practised, the hypocrisy thou hast shown, and the criminality thou hast indulged.
- LORD AUDLEY: Blackmail?
- AUGUSTUS: What an excellent word! I wish I had thought of it. Thou has reviled Jed and me for what thyself hath practised. We two are proud, thou a miserable chameleon, changing thy colours to thy prevailing fortune.
- LORD AUDLEY: *[Falsely friendly]* I have re-thought. Listen. I have fought too hard for my position to yield it up tamely. I cannot have thee in the village, knowing what thou knowest. I will give thee gold – more than thou ever dreamt on before. Take it, go away, you and Jed, and start a new life elsewhere.

- AUGUSTUS: Jed will never leave willingly. Much Audley is his life, his world. I could never tell him, we must leave.
- LORD AUDLEY: Invent some excuse...
- AUGUSTUS: Traitor! Wouldst thou have me practice the vile arts of deception on those I love? Never!
- LORD AUDLEY: Beware! Where I cannot remove an obstacle, I will crush it.
- AUGUSTUS: Or be crushed!
- LORD AUDLEY: Thou wilt turn informer then?
- AUGUSTUS: No, avenger of my wrongs! And those of that hapless wife that thou hast so abused.
- LORD AUDLEY: Then thou wilt war with me?
- AUGUSTUS: If necessary – unto the death!
- LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* To the death – that is the word! – the only escape. *[To AUGUSTUS]* Then, since thou art merciless –
- AUGUSTUS: As thou art cunning. Last night the luxurious gilded roof of Audley Hall sheltered thee. Tonight a prison roof will cover thy head.
- LORD AUDLEY: I defy thee! Scorn thee! I spurn thee for a vindictive fool. Go to the Justice. I am the Justice. Go to Lady Audley, if thou wilt – denounce me, do – and I will swear to her thou art a liar – a madman. She will believe me before thee. I have gained her heart, her soul, her unbounded confidence. Before

there is a felon's dock for me, there is a maniac's cell for thee. Ha! Ha! Ha!

AUGUSTUS: Thou art a fool. Thou hast forgot, my lord, that I have a friend, a faithful friend. Jed Burke. He doth worship my very stools. That we sit on. I am not helpless, and should any harm befall me, woe, woe indeed unto the guilty one! I am not so easily got rid of.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* We shall see – I have offered him a bribe, I have used threats. I shall now employ cunning.

AUGUSTUS: Come, sir. Wilt thou give thyself up, or must I force thee?

*[AUGUSTUS seizes LORD AUDLEY]*

LORD AUDLEY: Thou art right. I see that my position is hopeless, and it is the more honourable course to admit all. Thy words have pierced me. Thou needst not constrain me.

AUGUSTUS: I will believe thee.

*[LORD AUDLEY sways]*

LORD AUDLEY: But I am o'ercome with dizziness. My head whirls. These sudden events have put me in a quinsy; if I were a lady I would have the vapours. Water, I pray thee. My temples throb so.

AUGUSTUS: One moment.

LORD AUDLEY: My head burns like fire.

AUGUSTUS: I will moisten my kerchief in the well. But this is the last service I e'er will perform for thee.

*[He goes to the well and leans over it. LORD AUDLEY creeps up behind him. He takes out the iron well-handle which he concealed at the start of the scene.]*

LORD AUDLEY:                   It is indeed thy last. Die – die – die.

*[He pushes AUGUSTUS down the well.]*

LORD AUDLEY:                   He is gone – gone. And no-one to witness the deed.

*[REV. TOADSPAWN and TARA MASALATA peek out from behind separate lime trees, unbeknownst to each other.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN:               Excepting I!

TARA MASALATA:               Excepting I!

LORD AUDLEY:                   Dead men tell no tales. I am free! I am free! I am free! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

*[REV. TOADSPAWN and TARA MASALATA look on; he raises his arms in triumph, laughing in exaltation as:-]*

**THE CURTAIN FALLS**

**END OF ACT ONE**

Act Two

*[A street in Old London Town full of gaming dens, gin shops, brothels etc. The lower parts of Earls Court.]*

CHORUS 1: Three long months have passed, and no avenging hand has brought down justice on the head of the murderer of Augustus.

CHORUS 2: On the contrary, he prospers. August despatched, Cosy Cottage is rudely sold –

LORD AUDLEY: Do you want it or not? Then give me the bloody money.

CHORUS 2: That's very rudely sold. Over the head of the grieving Jed.

CHORUS 3: The hand that trained the climbing rose to wander o'er the trellis shall pluck these fragile blooms no more.

CHORUS 1: Lord Audley tells Jed that Augustus, overcome with shame at his debt, has indeed gone to sea for a pirate, where he was overpowered by seamen, and drowned

CHORUS 2: which simple Jed believes, as it is also sworn to by now Canon Jonas Toadspawn; who sees well the advantage to be gained in maintaining and increasing the estates of his Lordship. For it is well to fatten the goose that lays the golden eggs.

CHORUS 3: Is Jed suspicious? Does he vow to fathom the mystery? Does he never consider that Augustus told him he was going to see Lord Audley and never returned from seeing Lord Audley? Does he never think that Lord Audley might have had a role in Augustus disappearance? Does he not swear, as all

true lovers should, that he will never rest till the truth lies revealed? No he does not, for not only is he remarkably naïve, he is also thick as pigshit. In his grief. Caring naught for his life or the opinion of the world, he desperately roams the high road.

CHORUS 2: - Till he is arrived at that great centre of vice and villainy, to which all roads lead for the poor, the outcast and the desperate – Earl's Court.

CHORUS 3: There in mean taverns he throws himself into debauchery with men encased in leather, to lose himself and hide the heavy load which weighs upon his heart.

*[Enter JED, despairing]*

JED: Has't come to this? Outcast from friends and home; regarded with pity at best; at worst, with fear. Why did he desert me thus? Together we might have faced the worst the world might offer, but no – he had too low opinion of my constancy. He thought me light and faithless. Oh woe! What is to become of me? I am starving, deserted, miserable. Though I am penniless, still must I have liquor. Ha! My kerchief! 'Twill buy me tuppence-worth of gin at all events.

*[JED rushes off. Enter REV. TOADSPAWN]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Verily this London Town is Babylon itself. I shall be gladder than the Israelites that were led from Egypt to the Promised Land by the prophet, when I can return to rural domesticity. Save that I have to pay my respects to My Lord Kendall and His Grace, the Bishop of Toddington, I would have left ere now. There are those who would allow clerical elevation to ascend to that seat of reason which the simple term, The Head. Pah! I despise such vulgar show. I will comport

myself in the manner to which advancement points the way.

*[Re-enter JED]*

JED: Damnation! The pawn would not give me three farthings for my kerchief. My mouth is dry, my head, fuzzy, and buzzing with innumerable bees. Nor can I keep the sight of dear Augustus long from my fancy.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Seeing JED]* The wretched catamite! And out at elbows, as is the common speech, or else I lose my clarity of vision. I will ply him with spirit, and hasten him on the path to his perdition. A miserable gutter-death shall be his lot. I, of course, am above such things, which but point the way to the primrose path. I, praise the Lord, have always held spirituous liquor as my servant, not my master. *[To JED]* Well, Jed, such a surprise to see thee in the great metropolis. But mayhap thou hast right to come here. A likely lad can make his fame and fortune.

JED: Reverend Toadspawn! *[Aside]* They used to say he was good for a drink or two.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Ahem – Canon Toadspawn.

JED: Lord, what a great gentleman thou hast become!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I am here in the City of the Plains, which some name London, for some business with His Grace, the Bishop.

JED: Heavens!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Take not the name of the LORD in vain.

JED: Folks from Much Audley should stick together. How about a drink to celebrate?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Aside]* How pat he falls in with my plan! *[To JED]*  
My dear young man, how couldst thou tempt me thus?  
It ill behoves a man of my calling. And yet, for old  
times' sake, and the memory of thy dear mother...

JED: *[Aside]* Mother! How that word lashes my heart!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I will cast aside my scruples. I shall render unto  
Caesar the things that are Caesar's – and unto Captain  
Morgan the things which are Captain Morgan's. Lead  
on.

JED: *[Aside]* How pat he falls in with my plan! I am saved.  
*[To TOADSPAWN]* This way, good sir.

*[They exit]*

Scene Two

*[Another part of London – Fleet Street]*

CHORUS 1: But Jed and the thirsty Canon are not the only two to feel the lure of London

CHORUS 2: For as they search the meaner streets in quest of some low alehouse, another searches too,

CHORUS 3: Lord Audley, though he rides high upon the wheel of fortune, cannot but think of the chasm below, should Jed rouse himself to suspicion.

CHORUS 1: Thus are the guilty punished by the workings of their own CONSCIENCE. *[Aside]* Author's message.

CHORUS 2: The voice of GOD in the Temple of our hearts, that will not cease to speak, even when we cease to listen.

*[Enter LORD AUDLEY]*

LORD AUDLEY: Curse the infernal man! Must he rise everywhere to haunt each waking hour? I see Augustus at every street corner. I cannot sleep at night without his apparition in my dreams. Of ghastly aspect, he shakes his gory locks at me. He points accusing fingers, crying 'Jed, Jed, avenge me!' What if he appears thus to his former friend? Will that not turn him from the path of damnation on which he has been set? No, I cannot rest until the hand which might rise in retribution hath been felled – finally and for ever! But where is he? How shall I find him in a city of a million lost souls? Fleet Street is the most clamorous and frequented part of the town, though swarming with the lowest, basest, vilest of men – journalists. I shall start my enquiries here.

*[He pauses outside a shop, reads the letters over the top:]*

LORD AUDLEY: "Sweeney Todd – Barber. Teeth pulled by appointment."  
Why, a barber is a busy fellow! He has the ear of all his neighbours, and that's a lot of ears. He is well acquainted with the gossip of the town. I shall have a shave, which, due to the hardness of my journey, I stand much in need of. Inside, I shall engage the fellow subtly in conversation.

*[He enters. TODD comes evilly towards him, breathing heavily and sharpening his razor.]*

TODD: A customer! And so early in the day. This comes most conveniently. I have shrunk almost to nothingness. *[To LORD AUDLEY]* Good morning, sir. And how may I have the pleasure of serving thee? A shave? A trim? *[In a fit]* Slit thy throat from ear to ear? *[Normal]* I'm sorry, sir, I don't know what came over me.

LORD AUDLEY: Think nothing of it. A shave, I fancy. I have – a young lady I wish to – entertain.

TODD: A shave? Nothing simpler. In fact, I think I can promise thee that after a shave from me, thou'lt never want another! *[Fit again]* Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!

*[His evil laugh turns into a cough.]*

LORD AUDLEY: That's the devil of a cough, thou hast there, barber.

TODD: The merest touch of swine flu. Wilt thou sit here, sir? No – this chair, sir. It is most comfortable. Once thou hast sat in it, thou'lt find it hard to get up again.

*[Same business of a laugh and a cough. LORD AUDLEY sits. TODD strops his razor furiously, waves it under AUDLEY's nose.]*

TODD: Wouldst thou be from out of town, sir? If thou wilt pardon my presumption, thou hast the air of a country gentleman.

LORD AUDLEY: Thou hast sharp eyes, barber.

TODD: And an even sharper razor. Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Then thou hast no relatives, sir. I mean, no relatives close at hand to make enquiries?

LORD AUDLEY: What kind of enquiries?

TODD: Should something – befall thee. Though Heaven forbid!

LORD AUDLEY: My mother died at my birth. I was her first and only child. And so was my twin, who died at birth too.

TODD: How very convenient! I mean, to be the sole heir.

LORD AUDLEY: True. But wealth can never repair the desolation of the orphan.

TODD: Noble sentiments indeed, sir.

*[He lathers LORD AUDLEY]*

LORD AUDLEY: Tell me, barber, thou must have many people coming through your shop.

TODD: Not exactly through, sir. Many are in and out in a trice. Many are seen once, then never seen again.

LORD AUDLEY: Has there by any chance passed this way a gentleman from Much Audley in Somerset?

TODD: We have so many... Let me think...

LORD AUDLEY: Of some twenty years, with dark curly hair.

- TODD: Short, broad-shouldered, and of a manly disposition?
- LORD AUDLEY: The same
- TODD: His manner somewhat rough, but with a sweet nature withal?
- LORD AUDLEY: That's it!
- TODD: A dimple in his chin, and a birthmark under his right ear?
- LORD AUDLEY: Wasn't it left ear?
- TODD: No, it was left there, under his right ear.
- LORD AUDLEY: Have you seen him?
- TODD: No, never seen him.
- LORD AUDLEY: Well look out for him. A rough diamond, as they say.
- TODD: Diamonds? Didst thou say diamonds?
- [A mad look of greed comes into his eyes, and he brandishes the razor again.]*
- LORD AUDLEY: Nay, a rough diamond, as the saying has it.
- TODD: I catch thy drift. *[He starts shaving]*
- LORD AUDLEY: There's gold for the man who brings me tidings of him.
- TODD: Gold? Didst thou say gold?

*[He prepares to slit LORD AUDLEY's throat.]*

LORD AUDLEY: Of which I have plenty. *[The razor is raised.]* Though not about me at this moment.

TODD: Oh. *[He changes his mind.]*

LORD AUDLEY: But the man who comes forward with reliable information will not find me ungenerous.

TODD: I will make enquiries in the street, and post a notice in the tavern, The Jolly Cholera.

LORD AUDLEY: Barber, thou art an honest man. And honesty is a pearl beyond price.

TODD: Pearls? Didst thou say pearls?

*[Mad greed and flourishing of razor again.]*

LORD AUDLEY: Say that any man with knowledge of the whereabouts of Jed Burke should present himself at the Cock, Cheapside. Yes, tell him to stop a policeman and ask for 'Cock'. There he should make himself known to Mr Barker.

TODD: Barker? *[Changes his mind again about slitting throat.]* Did anyone in your family make mention of one, Benjamin Barker, who was sent by the evil Judge Turpin to the Colonies as a criminal, so that the said Judge could have his wicked way with Barker's beautiful young wife, Lucy.

LORD AUDLEY: No. Why?

TODD: No reason. I merely wondered. That will be four pence, good sir.

LORD AUDLEY: Here's a shilling for thy pains. Rub it on them nightly. There shall be more if thou dost perform other services so excellent.

TODD: I shall be energetic in thy enterprise, rest assured.

LORD AUDLEY: Barker's the name, remember. *[Aside]* I would not alert Jed as to my interest.

TODD: Yes, Mr Barker. Good day, sir.

*[They shake hands. LORD AUDLEY exits, TODD follows him brandishing his razor, but forces himself back to normality.]*

Scene Three

*[A street in Earl's Court, outside the Bona Arms]*

CHORUS 1: Jed meanwhile is ignorant of all Lord Audley's designs.

–

CHORUS 2: - and indeed to all the world –

CHORUS 3: and recks not of past, present or future.

CHORUS 1: For in the hands of the Reverend, now Canon,  
Toadspawn, the weak-willed Jed is putty.

CHORUS 2: The Canon plies him first with brandy, then with  
whisky, finally with pina colada –

CHORUS 3: All the while resisting with heroic self-control the  
desire to match measure for measure with th'inebriate  
Jed.

CHORUS 1: He pours his own measures away, while a small tear  
rolls down his cheek *[TOADSPAWN sniffs dramatically]*  
at the waste of God's own bounty.

CHORUS 2: So the Canon has not gone off when Jed is carried  
insensate to the street.

*[JED is dumped in the street. He wakes with a muzzy head.]*

JED: Where am I? Do people dream after they are dead?  
Hideous, hideous. I should like to be dead if I could  
not dream. 'Tis morning. Or is it night? Which is it?  
I wanted daylight, but now 'tis come, what shall I do  
with it? Parched! Parched! Brandy! Rum! I am not  
so stricken with despair when I am drunk and  
descended to oblivion. What horrid place is this?  
Pain! Dreadful pain! Heavens! How I tremble!  
Brandy! Brandy!

*[He writhes on the ground, in delirium.]*

Here, here, friend! Take these off from me, will you? These snakes which coil around me! Oh how strong they are! They stifle me and choke me! – No, don't kill them, give them brandy, poison them with rum, that would be justice! Ha! Ha! The spiders come, the spiders big as plates. See, they crawl all over me! Why don't the snakes eat the spiders? Away! Away!

*[He pants for breath, exhausted. A new train of thought.]*

Hush, gently! Gently, while he sleeps, I'll kiss him. Hush, hush, no sound. He would reject me, light and faithless, if he knew it. Hush. Heaven bless my Augustus. Hush. If the globe slides round once more, we shall all slip from its surface into ETERNITY! A boiling sea of wine, fired by the torch of fiends. Ha ha ha!

*[Enter TARA MASALATA]*

TARA MASALATA: What's this? Why mercy, 'tis that young friend of Augustus! And helpless, quite helpless.

JED: All's quiet now. The snakes sleep too. They think I cannot escape.

*[He fishes in his pockets, and produces a string of pearls.]*

JED: What's this? How came this here? I did not steal this – or did I? I have no memory. My mind's an alcoholical blank. Or did it come here by some malevolent design? Such pearls are worth a fortune – or death if I am discovered. If men hang for stealing of a loaf, how much worse will I fare?

Well, I am tired of this crime. But stay! It is no crime to purloin sleep at an apothecary's store – none – none! Now for the universal antidote – the all-powerful conqueror of every worldly care – DEATH!

*[He produces a phial, and is about to drink, when TARA MASALATA seizes it from him and casts it away.]*

JED: Ha! Who art thou? What art thou?

TARA MASALATA: Nay, friend, throw not thy life away, but mend thy ways.

JED: Friend? I know thee not. I am a fiend, weak-willed, who disgraces the memory of him who loved me.

TARA MASALATA: I come not to upbraid thee. I come to save thee. Thou hast been drinking.

JED: *[Ironic]* Worked that out, hast thee? Well done! I am dying now for liquor. Wilt thou give me brandy?

TARA MASALATA: Never!

JED: Not even a liqueur chocolate?

TARA MASALATA: They're fattening!

JED: Who art thou that takes an interest in an unhappy sinner?

TARA MASALATA: I am friend to all outcasts. Thou art a catamite, and, if a catamite, a brother to the gypsy tribe. *[To audience]* Or Roma. All right?

JED: But I am lost. What use can I be to thee?

TARA MASALATA: Art thou indeed a fallen man? Then thou hast the utmost claim upon me. I shall raise thee once more,

for she who lifts a fallen fellow creature from the dust is greater than the heroine who conquers a world.

JED: My mother's dying words! Who and what art thou? Art thou a bird? Art thou a plane?

TARA MASALATA: I am one whose life and labours rescue their fellow persons from the abyss into which they have fallen. I administer the pledge of sobriety to those who would once more become a blessing to themselves and those around them.

JED: That picture is too bright. It cannot be.

TARA MASALATA: You see before you one who for twenty years was prey to this dreadful folly. Twelve bottles of Special Brew and hair restorer for chasers.

JED: No, it is too late for me.

TARA MASALATA: 'Tis never too late. Come with me. Strength will be given thee. The Parent of Purity smiles upon honest endeavours. Come, enrol thy name among the Free, the disenthralled, and be thyself again.

*[She produces THE PLEDGE, which JED signs with a quill pen.]*

TARA MASALATA: A hearty welcome. In token of our pact, have a blast on this instead.

*[She gives him an enormous joint, which he drags deeply on.]*

TARA MASALATA: I am Tara Masalata. I am friend to thee – and to thy lover, Augustus.

JED: His name again! Didst thou know him?

- TARA MASALATA: Ay, till – the very end. I could tell thee such things as would make thy toes curl.
- JED: Tell me, for heaven's sake.
- TARA MASALATA: Why? Nobody wants curly toes. Besides, the time is not yet ripe. This alone will I tell thee now. Lord Audley hath done thee great wrong.
- JED: He did defile the domestic cot, 'tis true.
- TARA MASALATA: Greater even than crapping in bed.
- JED: I meant he was unfaithful. Though at least he got a decent price for his infidelities.
- TARA MASALATA: Even greater than that. And this too I shall tell thee. The Audley man has done me much woe as well. Woe, woe, woe beyond measure. And I too shall have revenge. And thou wilt help me. Thus we too shall bring him to his doom. Doom, doom! He be doomed, I tell thee. Ha! Ha! Ha!
- JED: Doom? You mean – kill him?!
- TARA MASALATA: And have his testicles as an ornament for my bosom.
- JED: I like it not. I have never feared any man, but – DEATH?!
- TARA MASALATA: It is too good for the likes of him. If thou requirest further proof, meet me on Hampstead Heath at midnight. The gypsy/Romany band is gathering for the fair, and having a bit of a jam session. The morrow is Mouldimass. Lord Audley too is in London, and thither will I lure him to his downfall. Ha! Ha! Ha!



Scene Four

*[The Heath at midnight. Enter the CHORUS.]*

CHORUS 1:                   And so, at midnight, upon the Heath –

CHORUS 2:                   Which the raunchiest denizens of London do frequent  
–

CHORUS 3:                   Our actors haste to play out the strange drama of the  
heart, the eternal battle 'twixt good and evil, the  
Manichean conflict which has raged in man since man  
crawled from the slime, the existential angst –

CHORUS 1:                   Get on with it! Stop padding it out!

CHORUS 2:                   Jed flies to meet Tara

CHORUS 3:                   Tara flies to meet her tribe.

CHORUS 1:                   Audley's flies – are undone. Nevertheless he flies to  
obey a mysterious summons, conveyed by Mr. Todd,  
to meet one who will inform on Jed Burke with full  
particulars.

CHORUS 2:                   The result of a notice posted by Tara on the fine oak  
panelling of The Jolly Cholera.

CHORUS 3:                   And, unlikely though it may seem, yet strain thy  
credence, gentle viewer, Canon Jonas Toadspawn also  
flies to this ungodly spot. Not since the Grenadier  
Guards Bring and Buy Sale has the Heath been so  
busy. The Canon seeks urgent conference with Lord  
Audley.

*[Enter Rev. TOADSPAWN and LORD AUDLEY]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN:        I tell thee, this is not enough.

- LORD AUDLEY: What more can I offer? Thou hast had thy regular payments, all that my estate can afford. I have preferred thee, honouring my pledge. I have whispered in the ear of the Bishop, and lo! Thou art advanced.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: I crave yet more. Thy back is broad enough that I may climb yet further on it. I need money.
- LORD AUDLEY: There is no more.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: A large down-payment, which may equip me for polite society. An introduction to an Archbishop does not come cheap. 'Tis more than to the most exclusive whore.
- LORD AUDLEY: 'Tis impossible. *[Aside]* Now I see my past actions repaid in full. I did deal with Augustus even so. *[To TOADSPAWN]* I beg thee –
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: My needs are too pressing –
- LORD AUDLEY: My own words coming back thrown in my face!
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: May I remind thee, my Lord, I have the means to bring thee to thy ruin. How would Polite Society reward thee, if it were known thou hast been a sodomite? Flight would be thy only escape, with loss of Audley Hall. It would fall to Lady Audley.
- LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* He has grown too bold. I shall have to polish him off too.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: Bring thee to thy ruin! Let thy heart turn to ice to think on't.
- LORD AUDLEY: But think thee too. Thou needest me. Thou wilt not kill the golden goose?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Never – as long as it continues to lay the golden eggs.

LORD AUDLEY: I must have time to devise means to meet thy growing demands.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: That's better – thou art growing pliable. I will forgive thee, as our saviour enjoined, and rejoice more over one lost sheep returned to the fold than the ninety and nine who ne'er did stray.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* Oh, hypocrite! *[To TOADSPAWN]* I will meet thee again. I return to Much Audley at noon tomorrow by the non-stop Express Stage. I will see thee there, when I have had more opportunity to realise my assets. *[Aside]* And form a plan to Polish him Off. Ha! Ha!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I am content. But be warned – thou shalt not escape the wrath of the righteous man.

*[Exit TOADSPAWN]*

LORD AUDLEY: Jed... Toadspawn... How all my troubles do crowd upon me! Will I never see my way to cut through this entangled web? And now, where is my mysterious informant? This is the place, this is the hour. I will retire behind a tree, and while I am waiting, devise a means to rid me of this turbulent priest.

*[Exit LORD AUDLEY]*

*[Enter TARA MASALATA and her gipsies/Roma; this is the CHORUS in earrings and gaily patterned headscarves.]*

TARA MASALATA: Yes, friends I have news. You remember all too well, as I know but the audience doesn't, the night of horror when our tents were all fired, our dear sister killed, and several others hideously scarred.

- CHORUS 1: I remember all too well. I bear the marks to this day.
- CHORUS 2: I too bear the marks.
- CHORUS 3: But thou wert so hideous anyway, nobody noticed the difference.
- CHORUS 2: Bitch.
- CHORUS 3: *[To AUDIENCE]* Face like a slapped arse.
- TARA MASALATA: Stop this squabbling or I shall lose my thread. Pay attention. Now this self-same perpetrator of that outrage, the proud young Lord Audley, has designs to drive us from the Common where we have pitched our tents since the time of our great-great-great-great-great *[She counts up]* great-grandparents.
- CHORUS 2: But ere we leave, we will have vengeance full and deep.
- ALL: Ay, vengeance, vengeance.
- TARA MASALATA: Fear not, that we shall have. This Audley has used us for his sport. Hunted us like wild beasts. And for our resistance, many of our tribe now lie in gaol. But the vengeance on Audley belongs to me.
- LORD AUDLEY: *[Off]* My name? Ah, those rascally gypsies, blackamoors all. I'll listen...
- TARA MASALATA: The wrongs that he hath done to our tribe are as nothing to the great wrong that he has done to me. He robbed me of my own fair love, Tzatziki. He made her boil to pitch before my very eyes, and listen to her screams, powerless to come to her aid. For these deeds I'll make him outcast in his turn, strip him of his fortune. Let him suffer the pangs of despised beggary that we suffer. Let them drag him to the

gallows' foot, then, with my vengeful eye glaring in his, and with my cry of bitter mockery ringing in his ear, I'll force him to mount step by step, till I place the rope around his neck. This will be my long and painful vengeance.

CHORUS 1: Sisterhood is powerful.

CHORUS 2: Our brothers cry for vengeance from their prison cells.  
Shall they cry in vain?

TARA MASALATA: No! He has a fine town house. Jewels, furs. In the country at Much Audley, wheat and hay. Take them. Put them to the flame. Make him a beggar, and once that is complete, I will reveal the secret that will put the rope around his neck. Nay, I'll not reveal my secret yet, until your work of destruction is complete. But then I shall give proof will drag that fine young Lord to a murderer's DOOM!

CHORUS 1: 'Tis a glorious plan.

CHORUS 2: The light to guide us home shall be the flaming ruins of Audley's fine town house.

*[The TRIBE exits]*

TARA MASALATA: Ha Ha! Vengeance! After years of watching and waiting. Mark down my game, ye trusty dogs.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Off]* 'Tis lucky I overheard them. This hideous crone knows something. Can it be that she too saw me strike down Augustus? If so, another witness rises to torment me. But I will find the means to Polish Her Off as well! And gain the plaudits of society for ridding it of gypsy vermin.

*[Re-enter the TRIBE carrying flaming torches.]*

CHORUS 1: Now is our time. I heard from servants down in Camden Town, Audley is away from home. But if he is at home, we will hurl him into the blazing fires.

TARA MASALATA: Brave boys! There is your work among the lights below. Soon all will be a heap of ruin, ha ha! Go to't.

CHORUS 2: Remember. Dead men tell no tales. This way! This way!

*[They Exit]*

TARA MASALATA: Would that Jed were here to see this glorious night! I would tell him all. But, stay! I had forgot. I had lured Audley away tonight for this express purpose. Where can he be?

*[Re-enter LORD AUDLEY, armed]*

LORD AUDLEY: Here, old traitress! Wouldst thou betray me, pitiful ancient hag?

TARA MASALATA: That's no way to talk to an old age pensioner.

LORD AUDLEY: Foul crone, wasted witch, bonkers beldam, gaga gammer – I hurl my thesaurus at thee!

TARA MASALATA: I care not. I will drive thee a beggar from thy home.

LORD AUDLEY: Ha! Ha! I can spit in thy face thanks to Sun Alliance. The house is insured to its full value, and more. It can go to the devil for all I care, I would rather have the money.

TARA MASALATA: But thy life is in my power. I am the lover of the dear, defunct Tzatziki, whom thou didst so carelessly confine to flames. I swore revenge, and now it is at hand. I dogged thee, step by step. Years of my life were spent dogging. And I did see how thou basely

silenced the voice that would rise up to accuse thee of that which thou reviled in others. Yes, I saw the strike down the helpless Augustus Manleigh. And I shall bear witness. Thy life is forfeit.

LORD AUDLEY: And so is thine, aged crone.

*[He shoots her. She falls]*

Thus perishes the other witness to my crime.

*[He exits. Enter JED.]*

JED: A shot! See, see, how my poor rescuer bleeds. *[He takes TARA in his arms.]* Who has done this to thee? Speak, aged crone.

TARA MASALATA: Sodding Nora, not you too.

JED: Gorgeous, pouting aged crone, *[to TARA]* is that better? *[TARA nods]* Speak to me.

TARA MASALATA: I have done with this world. I am dying. Swear to seek the scattered remnants of my tribe. Swear them upon the ancient Roma relics to pursue the path of vengeance, until our deaths be avenged, mine and dear Augustus Manleigh.

JED: Yes, yes! I swear. But who has done this?

TARA MASALATA: 'Tis well. My eyes grow chill. My blood grows dim. My sentences are scrambled. And see, the spirit of my Tzatziki calls me to my Roma home among the stars.

TSATSIKI: *[offstage]* Come and get it!

JED: I must insist. Who hath done this?

TARA MASALATA: *[With much dying]* The vile Lord Audley!

JED: He shall answer for this. But what of that secret? Thou hast promised to reveal all that concerns the fate of dear Augustus. Speak, I pray thee!

TARA MASALATA: Audley.... He.... Augustus.... At the well... they....

*[She dies]*

JED: Gone, gone. And never called me brother.

**[A HEART-BREAKING TABLEAU]**

**THE CURTAIN FALLS**

**END OF ACT TWO**

ACT THREEScene One

*[Lime Tree Walk at Audley End.]*

CHORUS 1: Tara is gone, and Jed is left friendless in the world.

CHORUS 2: And, oh, dear viewer, you may well imagine what a mighty turmoil rages within his breast.

CHORUS 3: Yet one thing seems clear. The name of Lord Audley remains inseparably linked both with Tara's death and his dear friend's disappearance.

CHORUS 1: He therefore forms a firm resolve, to return to Much Audley, and at Audley End confront the villain with his complicity in these deeds.

CHORUS 2: The pious Canon Toadspawn too has reason to return to his parish, where his flock – or one black sheep at least – has need of his pastoral care.

CHORUS 3: Therefore our scene returns from the bustle and baseness of the teeming streets, to the secluded peace of Much Audley –

CHORUS 1: - where Lady Audley these several days has languished 'gainst her husband's looked-for return.

*[Enter LADY AUDLEY, languishing.]*

LADY AUDLEY: Oh, miserable me! Where is my fond husband, who should ere now have returned to my dotting side? But two days, he promised. But now his absence has extended to a week. My mind misgives me. Do my charms fail?

CHORUS 1: *[Off]* Charms? Ha!

LADY AUDLEY: *[To off]* Piss off! Know your place, peasant. Where was I? That oik has ruptured me train.

What has happened? Has he found himself – my tongue can scarce frame the words – the consolations of some softer breast? For months now I have thought I did detect some coolness of his former manner. But I dismissed those thoughts as womanly weakness. Aye me! *[Sighs]* I fear that I must bear this burden with as much stoicism as weak, fond foolish female heart can muster. *[To AUDIENCE]* Who writes this rubbish? But 'tis cruel. 'Tis ever the fate of our weaker sex to suffer thus. Men must do, and we must wait. It is our lot. *[Aside]* Lot of tosh! It is also our duty, and for the purpose of the plot I will gladly embrace it.

*[Enter Rev. TOADSPAWN]*

LADY AUDLEY: *[Aside]* That man again. I cannot bear him in my sight.

*[She makes to leave.]*

REV. TOADSPAWN: Speed not so away, fair matron. *[To the Audience:]* I am somewhat short-sighted. *[To her:]* I bring thee news of great import. Thy husband returns.

LADY AUDLEY: My husband? Such tidings make me almost faint with ecstasy. *[Aside]* There's not a lot of excitement in Much Audley.

REV. TOADSPAWN: He catches the noon stage, and will be here ere night.

LADY AUDLEY: This news doth make the messenger almost fair in my sight. But stay! Why comes he on the stage? He rode away upon the finest hunter in our stables.

REV. TOADSPAWN: What became of it, I know not. Some lameness perchance? A cast off shoe? *[Aside]* I know he sold it to meet my just demands.

- LADY AUDLEY: No matter. He returns. And for this news I thank thee. Oh how my heart leaps at the prospect.
- REV. TOADSPAWN: Lady Audley, it is the duty of a Christian minister to warn thee... This is a delicate matter... I hesitate to say...
- LADY AUDLEY: Canon Toadspawn, if thou knowest aught which concerns me, then speak, I pray thee.
- REV. TOADSPAWN: Well then, I fear that when thy husband returns, thou wilt see his manner somewhat changed.
- LADY AUDLEY: Changed? What meanest thou?
- REV. TOADSPAWN: Thou mayest find him somewhat distant, prone to fall into a reverie, as Jacob did when he beheld the ladder until Heaven. Though I fear the object of his dream is not so pious.
- LADY AUDLEY: *[Aside]* This is as I feared. *[To TOADSPAWN:]* Be not so mealy-mouthed. Tell me, I beseech thee. In plain words. I have the strength to bear the truth.
- REV. TOADSPAWN: Well then... I fear that his affection may be turning elsewhere.
- LADY AUDLEY: Oh cruelty beyond compare!
- REV. TOADSPAWN: And in such manner as the world does not think fit to speak of. A young man, high born and fair...
- LADY AUDLEY: What are you saying?
- REV. TOADSPAWN: is now the object of his base passion –
- LADY AUDLEY: Never!
- REV. TOADSPAWN: Nor is this the first time. Ere he met thee, he dwelt ever, since childhood, in the tents of Sodom.

- CHORUS 1: *[From off]* Tents of Sodom are available from all good camping shops.
- LADY AUDLEY: Out! Out of my sight, base cleric! I will not listen to this outrage.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Oily]* Thou are upset. 'Tis natural. Thou dost grieve, thou dost mourn. As Ruth did in the alien corn. But remember this, dear Lady Audley. There are others also who hold thee in high regard. If ever thou hast need, there is one at least on whose services thou might call.
- LADY AUDLEY: I do not understand thee, sir.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: I mean – myself, dear Lady Audley.
- LADY AUDLEY: But you – are a man of GOD!
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: Even beneath the woollen cassock there lurks a frail man. Do I not have a beating heart? Do I not wear underpants?
- LADY AUDLEY: Canon –
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: If ever two human beings were meant to love each other, those two were thou and I.
- LADY AUDLEY: Canon Toadspawn, I forbid thee to speak such words to me.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: I must speak, Lady Audley. A few words, then I am silent for ever. I would have declared my love for thee, but my lowly status, my lack of prospects, prevented me from asking thee to be mine ere now. So I crushed my hopes inside me. But now, I am advanced, your husband in decline. The LORD in his beneficence has smiled on me. Now, a canon; how

long before a – Bishopric beckons. Oh what an ornament thou wilt be to any episcopal palace.

LADY AUDLEY: I will not hear this. Canon, thou art fired!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Thou meanst more to me than anything in the world.

LADY AUDLEY: How darest thou to address me so! Out of the kindness of his heart my husband hast preferred thee, advanced thee. Thou owest everything to him.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Aside]* 'Tis true more than thou knowest, dear child.

LADY AUDLEY: Thou forget'st thyself utterly, Canon!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: If I forget myself, it is because I am lost in thee! Forget thy spouse. Thou know'st he has turned away from thee.

LADY AUDLEY: I will not believe it.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Aside]* Now for the start of the dirty work.

LADY AUDLEY: I see thy plan now. Out, vile seducer, who masks his guile beneath his priestly garb.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: What if I bring thee proof positive Lord Audley has indulged in bestial passion? And with a labouring tenant on his own estate. Augustus Manleigh!

LADY AUDLEY: Never!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I have here a naughty lithograph depicting the seduction, taken from the life and showing the two in the very act! *[Aside]* I commissioned the artist myself, ha ha!

LADY AUDLEY: *[Aside]* Yet this Augustus Manleigh disappeared, 'tis true. Something is amiss for sure.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Stop acting like a stupid child, Aurora.

LADY AUDLEY: Cease this familiarity on th' instant.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Aside]* She is weakening; I must work swiftly. *[To LADY AUDLEY]* My poor young lady. I have only thy best interests at heart. Let me be your faithful friend, the one person in whom thou canst confide. Confess it, thou hast long feared that something of this sort might happen. There have been tell-tale signs

LADY AUDLEY: That time I caught him wearing my sheepskin liberty bodice! He said it was against the cold, but that could not explain his use of lipstick, the resort of prostitutes and actors. Time and again I have cried myself to sleep because of this.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I knew it! My dear Aurora, I ask not that thou shouldst take my word alone – 'tis too true I have a vested interest. But if thou wilt meet me at the Old Well in Lime Tree Walk at eight of the clock tonight, I undertake that I shall bring thee proof positive

LADY AUDLEY: What proof is this?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: A have a letter, writ in Audley's own hand, which is more proof than the strongest rum, and beyond a doubt.

LADY AUDLEY: *[Aside, to AUDIENCE. Encourage response:]* Should I go or shouldn't I? Should I? Shouldn't I? I can't make up my mind. What to do? What to do? I dislike stooping to such base suspicions, but my heart is in such turmoil. I must have certainty. The doubts now multiply and thicken; there is no other way to weed them out.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Hast thou considered? Wilt thou do as I ask?

LADY AUDLEY: I will. But I must warn thee: this so-called proof of thine must be final, or I shall tell all to my husband, and retribution fall on thy calumnious head.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Not Solomon could be wiser in this than thou, dear Lady Audley.

LADY AUDLEY: What strain these tidings put upon my heart. My head is filled with wild surmise. I faint. I will retire to the Hall and rest awhile.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: At the Old Well, then!?

LADY AUDLEY: At the Old Well let it be. Till then, farewell!

*[LADY AUDLEY exits to the hall.]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: My greatest triumph is at hand! Soon the fly will be enmeshed within the spider's web! And now to complete my plans. When this weak and foolish Audley returns, I shall confront him. He grows rebellious, I fear. And when the goose ceases to lay the golden eggs, there is but one thing to do – Wring – Its – Neck! I shall force him to write the letter, on pain of public scandal and incarceration. In my clemency I shall offer him the alternative of flight to France, unknown and penniless, there to make his fortune and his way as best he can. He is yet young. His life doth lie before him. I have heard the catamites of France do not lack charms, and offer very fine baguettes. He will succumb. He is no match for me. He will take my offer. And once he is out of the way I shall be free to enjoy Aurora and her fortune. The Right Reverend Toadspawn... The Most Reverend Toadspawn... Toadspawn Cantuar –

*[Enter LORD AUDLEY]*

- Rev. TOADSPAWN: I wonder how one addresses an archbishop...
- LORD AUDLEY: Are you sending him first or second class?
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Aside]* Audley! I had not looked for his return so quickly!
- LORD AUDLEY: Toadspawn! *[Aside]* I had not looked for his return so quickly. *[To TOADSPAWN:]* Canon, thou art ahead of me it seems.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: I always endeavour to stay one step ahead of your Lordship.
- LORD AUDLEY: I'm sure it is most kindly meant.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: I also hoped to engage with your Lordship over that little matter of business we touched upon on the barren plain that is Hampstead.
- LORD AUDLEY: This one will suck me dry! I MUST Polish Him Off! And soon... *[To TOADSPAWN]* Dear Canon, the dust of the journey is still upon my garments, and I am tired.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: The stage must have travelled like the very devil.
- LORD AUDLEY: I travelled by the new steam railway as far as Chippenham. How the soot doth blow in one's eyes! I fear it will take a week to remove it from my hair.
- Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Aside]* Fear not, thou shalt undertake thy travels again sooner than thou thinkest. *[To AUDLEY]* My lord, I cannot brook too much delay. The matter of which I speak requires some urgency.

LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* Thy greed will not wait. But I am helpless.  
*[To TOADSPAWN]* Very well. I will meet thee at the Red Barn on Marten's Farm at eight of the clock.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: The Red Barn? Tis a secluded spot, and desolate.  
*[Aside]* I fear he means some mischief. I will take a cudgel at the least.

LORD AUDLEY: Secluded, yes. And chosen for that very purpose. There is great danger of being overheard on my estate. The servants wander everywhere. And the peasants increase mightily outside the shooting season. *[Aside]* I shall not make the same mistake that I did with Augustus.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: I shall meet thee there then.

LORD AUDLEY: Excellent. And I undertake to have such accommodating news as will transport thee out of this word – for joy.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Till nightfall, then! Farewell.

*[Rev. TOADSPAWN exits]*

LORD AUDLEY: One tormentor I am rid of, another is hurrying along the path to ruin; the third I shall Polish Off tonight. And then to reckon with Aurora, so I can at last enjoy wealth and status in untrammelled freedom. This foolish Toadspawn knows not that the trap is spring will take him to his doom. Ha! Ha! Ha!

*[He exits, shaking his fist at the audience.]*

**CURTAIN**

Scene Two

*[By The Red Barn.]*

CHORUS 1: Night falls. The birds have gone to sleep -

*[CHORUS 2 snores]*

- Save for the piping of the watchful nightjar

*[CHORUS 3 pipes]*

- and the solitary murmur of the owl

*[CHORUS 2 murmurs]*

- That's an owl?

CHORUS 2: You said murmur.

CHORUS 1: I was being poetic. Please yourselves. The solitary hoot of an owl.

CHORUS 2: Woooo! Woooo!

CHORUS 3: The dew falls, while the sky is yet pearled with the last faint traces of the sun.

CHORUS 1: While Toadspawn, shivering in the evening chill, makes his wary way across the fields -

CHORUS 2: - to his appointment with Lord Audley – and his DOOM!

CHORUS 3: A second shadowy figure can be discerned in outline, toiling in the gloom –

CHORUS 2: For Jed has such reason to return to Much Audley, as spurs him on the wings of angels; nor does fear

shadow his manly heart, when he knows he is in pursuit of JUSTICE!

*[Enter Rev TOADSPAWN, furtively]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Hello! Hello! Audley is not here yet. Where can he be? A weight presses on my heart, foreshadowing some ungodly import. The Red Barn – how like a vault it seems. Fear steals on me. I tremble in every limb. *[He trembles]* I will return unto the clergy house at once.

*[JED is heard coming]*

Nay, he is at hand. It is too late for flight. I shall await Lord Audley in the hayloft, where I may have the advantage, should he try any trick. Come, trusty cudgel, be my aid. I shall need the strength of Samson, the cunning of Joshua against the Canaanites, if I shall see this night through.

*[He exits into the barn. Enter JED.]*

JED: 'Tis he! The vile dissembling priest who plied me with liquor, and contrived to drive me to penury and shame! He too 'twas, who insisted so that Augustus had gone to be a sailor. What does he here? The Old Red Barn has not been used these many years. It is a gloomy and a fearful place. There's many say that it is haunted. This conniving Toadspawn is up to no good, I warrant. I shall stay and watch a while.

*[LORD AUDLEY enters silent and furtive.]*

And here comes the object of my search. This villain shall not live long, or I shall perish in the attempt to bring him on his knees before the law.

*[JED hides.]*

LORD AUDLEY: Now by all the powers, holy and unholy, I shall do't. Come, ye Gods, and give me strength. 'Tis turned eight. I heard the stroke upon the bells of St. Woodall's as I came across the field. Where is the oily canon? Is he arrived before me? I see him not. *[Calls]* Toadspawn! Toadspawn! Art thou here?

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Ay, I am here to quit thee in thy perfidy!

LORD AUDLEY: Friend Toadspawn, I am ready to quit thee! I have but one terrible agent to aid me, and that is fire. The Red Barn timbers are dry as sand, and rotten therewithal. Come, Robert, screw thy courage to the sticking place. One last, most terrible deed, and it is over.

*[He takes a rush, lights it and goes into the barn. The reflection of fire is seen within. He comes out again. The fire takes hold, the flames grow stronger. TOADSPAWN appears at an upstairs window, as the flames lick round him]*

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Fire! I am betrayed! I am lost. It rises fast. Fire! Fire! The flames do lick about my feet! Curses! Curses on the head of Robert Audley! Audley has locked the door to the loft. I am trapped! Oh, mercy! Mercy! Help! Help! The fire grows stronger and stronger! Great Heaven, I know I have been a bad and wicked man, but I will repent now, if only thou wilt save me.

LORD AUDLEY: Make bargains with thy God? It is too late. There's no repentance that can save thee now.

Rev. TOADSPAWN: Save me! Oh, save me! Help, someone! I choke! *[He coughs]* I choke *[He coughs again]* The air is stifling, I cannot breathe. *[He gurgles]* I die.

*[Rev TOADSPAWN dies.]*

LORD AUDLEY:           Dead! Dead! My other witness gone. I am safe!

*[He runs off.]*

JED:                       No! Lost eternally in the sight of HEAVEN!

**CURTAIN**

Scene Three

*[Lime Tree Walk again]*

CHORUS 1: While Toadspawn perishes in the fiery heat of the blazing barn -

CHORUS 2: A death which surely prepares him for the torments of the infernal regions in the life to come –

CHORUS 3: Lady Audley, with trembling heart, prepares to keep her assignation with the devious canon.

CHORUS 1: Oh, how her mind now twists and turns, what conflicts rage within her breast!

CHORUS 2: As she hesitantly walks in the dark along the gravel of Lime Tree Walk

CHORUS 3: To learn at last the truth about her husband

*[Enter LADY AUDLEY]*

LADY AUDLEY: Oh how my mind misgives me. Can this be true, what Toadspawn has confided? I cannot believe it. And yet he says he has proof positive. If this be so, oh miserable me! What a wretched prospect lies before me! The husband whom I loved and trusted, to whom I gave my very soul, will stand revealed as a sodomite, and, far worse than that, a deceiver and a hypocrite. 'Tis too hard to bear. *[Pause]* No, one must be brave. Thou must have certainty, whate'er befall. Ay me! These wretched doubts will kill me.

*[Enter LORD AUDLEY. LADY AUDLEY cannot see him in the gloom.]*

LADY AUDLEY: Canon Toadspawn?

- LORD AUDLEY: *[Aside]* Ha! Surprised! I must compose myself. *[To LADY AUDLEY:]* Nay, my love, tis I. What brings thee out a-walking so late of an evening, and to so secluded a spot as the Old Well?
- LADY AUDLEY: Husband! *[Aside]* How shall I confront him? I cannot. I shall dissemble for the nonce. *[To LORD AUDLEY:]* I found the house hot. It was making my bosom glow. I was restless for thy return. I thought to take the night air.
- LORD AUDLEY: I fear that thou wilt catch thy death of cold. *[Aside]* Ay, catch thy death indeed!
- LADY AUDLEY: Look! Look! There is a fire in the direction of the Old Red Barn.
- LORD AUDLEY: No, it is in quite a contrary direction. It is in the direction of Newport Pagnell, I would say.
- LADY AUDLEY: No, I am satisfied it is in the direction of the Red Barn. Should we not go and satisfy ourselves? An old barn like that will catch like tinder. It could be dangerous.
- LORD AUDLEY: No! We shall not go!
- LADY AUDLEY: Why not? Is there danger? I insist I go.
- LORD AUDLEY: And I insist that thou shalt not. Come back with me to the Hall. I order thee as thy husband.
- LADY AUDLEY: My mind misgives. I fear some harm has come to Canon Toadspawn.
- LORD AUDLEY: Harm? To Toadspawn? Thou sayest harm? What harm? There can be no harm. The Barn is quite Harm-less. Harm, indeed! What dost thou know of harm? *[Aside]* Does she know?

LADY AUDLEY: Some womanly intuition prompted me. I shall go and see.

LORD AUDLEY: If Toadspawn perishes, then good riddance. He was not fit to live.

LADY AUDLEY: How canst thou say that? He was a man, for all his faults. And a man of the cloth. *[Suspicious]* Why dost thou seek to prevent me? Thou hast some wicked motive, I see it in thine eye.

LORD AUDLEY: Thou art mistaken, woman.

LADY AUDLEY: No I am not. I see it all now. The canon was in possession of some dreadful secret. Thou wanted him out of the way. Oh cruel, wicked man! What did he know of thee, that thou shouldst wish him dead.

LORD AUDLEY: He knew too much. And now he is silenced.

LADY AUDLEY: But I am not! I will denounce thee to the Law. I will proclaim thee as a murderer. Help! Help!

LORD AUDLEY: If thou wilt not be silent, then I will have to stop thy mouth for ever!

*[He makes to kill her. They struggle. The ghost of AUGUSTUS rises out of the well.]*

LORD AUDLEY: *[Falling back]* But – thou art dead! Dost thou come back still to haunt me? Let me have peace at last.

AUGUSTUS: Audley, look on the murdered form of the man who loved thee. The toils of JUSTICE are winding close about thee. Do not think that thou shalt escape! The all-seeing eye is on thy every action. Farewell! I shall be beside thee on the scaffold.

*[LORD AUDLEY goes mad.]*

LORD AUDLEY:           Away! Away! Look not on me! I dare not gaze upon that ghastly form. Is it a dream? My brain reels. My flesh quivers. My eyeballs roll about their sockets, my heart throbs nigh unto bursting. His eyes are shot with ghastly fire, his hands are eagles' claws that will tear my throat.

*[Enter JED, carrying Rev TOADSPAWN in his manly arms. He lays TOADSPAWN down.]*

JED:                       *[To AUDIENCE]* After Audley fled, I leapt into the burning barn and just managed to drag the unconscious Toadspawn out before the blazing rafters came crashing down on our heads. Just thought you should know.

Rev. TOADSPAWN:       *[Reviving]* I thank HEAVEN I have been spared to do one act of justice ere I end my guilty life. I accuse this man of –

JED:                       Say nothing, I beg. Conserve thy strength.

Rev. TOADSPAWN:       I must speak. I accuse this man of –

LADY AUDLEY:           - there will be time once thou hast had some rest and some nourishing gruel –

Rev. TOADSPAWN:       I accuse this man of –

JED:                       Nay, there is a doctor on the way. He will cure thee with some lovely leeches.

Rev. TOADSPAWN:       I accuse this man of – *[He has a vision of HEAVEN]* Look, I see the heavens open, and the angels opening their arms. A choir sings, there is beautiful light. Everyone is smiling. *[Aghast]* As they point

me unto HELL! Too late! I am silent. Silent for ever  
– ever – ever!

*[Rev TOADSPAWN dies.]*

LADY AUDLEY: There is no need for silence. I can piece it all together. Canon Toadspawn was to bring me proof of Robert's treachery, but Robert's hand struck him down ere the hour of revelation. Fear not for my feelings, good Jed. I can bear the truth.

JED: In that case, I will tell the truth. Friend, hear me! I accuse that monster of the murder of Augustus Manleigh!

LORD AUDLEY: How and where? Prove it!

Rev. TOADSPAWN: *[Reviving]* I can tell thee that. He pushed him down that! Very well! *[Pause]* I'm sorry, I'll gasp that again. He pushed him down that very well! With my dying breath I testify this is the truth. Curses on the head of this vile monster! The grave doth gape for thee, Robert Audley, as well as me!

*[He dies again. Enter TARA MASALATA]*

TARA MASALATA: I too accuse Audley of this crime and others also!

LORD AUDLEY: You? Alive too? Is there no end to these resurrections? They become positively fashionable.

TARA MASALATA: Ay, I am alive. Thou hast thought to silence me, but thou didst not think of the silver beaver which I wear over my heart as a good luck charm. Once again I thank the Lord for my beaver. It has saved me yet again.

LORD AUDLEY: Give it here!

TARA MASALATA: No hand of man shall ever touch my beaver! Stand back while I lay the charge that thou hast pushed Augustus Manleigh down this well. But there is no need to search for him, for Augustus Manleigh is –

*[AUGUSTUS leaps forth, very much alive]*

AUGUSTUS: Here!

LORD AUDLEY: Alive? Thou art alive?

JED: Alive!

AUGUSTUS: Back, monster! Thank that woman and her tribe, who fished me out of the well, that thou dost not have my death on thy conscience. The blow that thou hast struck rendered me an invalid for many months. I durst not give away my whereabouts for fear that thou wouldst strike me down again. And so I waited, until the time was ripe. And now the time has come.

*[LORD AUDLEY goes mad. He thinks he is married to AUGUSTUS.]*

LORD AUDLEY: I give this no heed, I have no need to care. I am rich, I am powerful. I have a strong Manleigh husband who will protect me from the slings and arrows of the world. They told me he was dead, but they lied to me. Come, my Lord Augustus, thy arm, thy arm. We will leave this place. Our carriage awaits. Let us travel to exotic climes. Never heed what the world says – I have no husband but thee, only thee. Take my arm, my lord, my love –

*[AUGUSTUS recoils in horror at the proffered arm.]*

LORD AUDLEY: Do not shrink, dear husband, from thy little Roberta. It is time to board the coach. Come, my lord, come.

JED: What does this mean?

TARA MASALATA: Dost thou not see that he is mad?

ALL: *[Stepping back]* Mad?

LORD AUDLEY: Aye, aye, that is the word. I feel it in here, here.

*[He presses his hands to his temples]*

No, do not touch me, do not come near me. I feel the darkness clouding my mind.

TARA MASALATA: A hundred years from now it will be gender fluidity. But now –

LORD AUDLEY: Mad! Mad! Mad! Mad!  
I will gather posies  
I will gather flowers  
I will trip the light fantastic  
In and out of bowers  
See the wanton roses  
Drooping in the showers  
I will bite their heads off  
And chew on them for hours

*[He does a mad dance.]*

The time is come when I must flit away. Flit, flit flit, to fairy dells afar. Do not follow me, do not try to save me. Only the grave can save me, so let the grave, the cold grave close over Lord Audley and his Secret for ever.

*[He froths at the mouth, collapses and dies.]*

JED: And now, dear Augustus, we are reunited.

AUGUSTUS: Dear Jed. Come hold me in a manly embrace.

*[They embrace]*

TARA MASALATA: But hold!

JED: Hold what?

TARA MASALATA: Stay a moment. There is one thing I have left out of my account. My tribe has helped thee, as it should protect another outcast. But there is something else, more personal and urgent which led us to thy succour.

JED/AUGUSTUS: What is it?

TARA MASALATA: When one of my tribe came to thee, rescued thee from the well, they took thee to our tents, stripped thee, bathed thee. And there did they observe that upon thy flank there was not a strawberry birthmark.

JED/AUGUSTUS: What does it mean? Tell us.

TARA MASALATA: Many years ago, when I was young and foolish, before I met my beloved Tzatziki, I had not yet renounced the ways of men. A gallant came – he promised I should be his bride. My innocent eyes saw not through his guile. In fond delusion I submitted to his lusts, and threw away that jewel which should be preserved for other women's delight alone. A child there was –

JED/AUGUSTUS: Go on.

TARA MASALATA: A child so beautiful and fair. One day it was snatched from its crib upon the Heath by a wealthy upper-class woman, and never seen again. Till now.

JED/AUGUSTUS: Thou meanest - ?

- TARA MASALATA: Yes. That child didn't have a strawberry birthmark upon its upper flank either.
- AUGUSTUS: Mother!
- TARA MASALATA: Son!
- LADY AUDLEY: But – stay! One moment! I too lack a strawberry birthmark upon my upper flank.
- TARA MASALATA: This runs always in our family.
- LADY AUDLEY: But how - ?
- TARA MASALATA: There was a sister. Many years younger than I. I left upon my travels, a ruined woman, shortly after she was born. She too disappeared from her crib, prey to another aristocratic woman.
- AUGUSTUS: Can this be true?
- TARA MASALATA: There's a lot of it about.
- LADY AUDLEY: *[To TARA]* Sister!
- TARA MASALATA: *[To LADY AUDLEY]* Sister!
- LADY AUDLEY: *[To AUGUSTUS]* Nephew!
- AUGUSTUS: *[To LADY AUDLEY]* Auntie!
- JED: But stay! One moment more! This man that so seduced thee, what was his name?
- TARA MASALATA: 'Tis engraved on my heart. Sir Chorley Wood.
- JED: I knew't. Hear me. My mother told me on her deathbed – *[to AUDIENCE]* – remember that in Act One? – *[to others]* she told me that my father had

gone to his grave with a dreadful secret. He was not the simple peasant that he seemed. Years before, he had been highborn, and led the rakehell life. He had seduced many an innocent girl with promise of marriage and position. The last of these girls was – different. Something about her stirred his conscience. He came to lead the simple rural life where he might repent in quiet solitude. He came here, to Much Audley, where he met my dear departed mother, and – the rest thou knowest.

AUGUSTUS: You mean - ?

JED: Half-brother!

AUGUSTUS: Half-brother?

TARA MASALATA: Stepson!

JED: Stepmother!

LADY AUDLEY: Step-nephew!

JED: Step-aunt!

TARA MASALATA: Sister!

LADY AUDLEY: Sister!

JED: But this means – Augustus, we must be parted. No longer can we enjoy such embraces, if we are blood-related.

TARA MASALATA: Oh come now. What's a little incest among friends? And since there can be no child, no question of in-breeding –

AUGUSTUS: We have thy blessing, mother?

- TARA MASALATA: You have indeed. A fig for patriarchal taboos.
- LADY AUDLEY: Then a fig for elitist oppressive silly Sloane accents too. Some home stirs within my heart. This strong attractive woman opens my eyes. New thoughts, new ideas, stir within my breast. Strange desires, unfamiliar to me, are welling up. I need a damp cloth.
- TARA MASALATA: I too am stirred. I long to teach thee new ways, to wake thy sleeping heart.
- LADY AUDLEY: Women loving women seem more attractive than ever before. I knew deep down that this was in my thoughts, but until this vile wretch did force the scales from my eyes, I did not see it.
- JED: Then thou wilt not revile us, Augustus and I, and bring humiliation and public disgrace upon our heads?
- LADY AUDLEY: Why should I? There is naught disgraceful about thee. I see thee as upright, virtuous and fair. Who is there here among us who is not subject to unnatural desires? Why, Toadspawn! Look at him, this flabby, drunken, lecherous, hypocritical, self-righteous sybaritic worm!
- AUGUSTUS: But what dost thou really think of him?
- LADY AUDLEY: Would anyone in their right mind wish to be like him? No, I shall choose the path of deviation. It is more upright to be bent!
- TARA MASALATA: And I too shall settle in Somerset.
- JED: Which part?
- TARA MASALATA: All of me. So I can be near my dear Aurora.

- JED: And we two shall return unto the cottage, unto the bliss we have known before.
- AUGUSTUS: One moment. This cannot be. Too much hath happened not to change me. The kindness I have had from the Roma, the things that I have seen from the rich and powerful, mean that I can never turn my back upon the world again. This rural idyll is pleasant but it ignores the poor with their faces ground into the dust, the outcasts stoned from 'civilised' habitation. I cannot return. I would feel too guilty being idle.
- JED: But what wilt thou do?
- AUGUSTUS: I shall join the Co-operative Labour Movement and become a Chartist.
- JED: But what of me?
- AUGUSTUS: Dear Jed, tend the estate. Make it thrive and prosper, that its wealth may be shared with thy fellow workers, and money raised for our just cause.
- JED: I fear my heart will break for lack of thee.
- AUGUSTUS: Take other lovers, find other friends. And I shall return for many a joyous homecoming. Dear Jed.
- JED: Dear Augustus.
- TARA MASALATA: Dear Aurora –
- LADY AUDLEY: Dear Tara.

**TABLEAU**

**THE END**