

ACT I

Scene 1: Introducing 'The Gentleman Highwayman'

(A coach road through a forest. It is night-time, the only light comes from the moon. Mist swirls. The sound of a coach approaching. JOHN as THE HIGHWAYMAN steps from the shadows and stands centerstage. He raises his pistol towards the audience)

HIGHWAYMAN Halt or I fire!

Scene 2: The truth is revealed to Warburton.

(A sitting room. A fireplace crackles. There are two comfortable chairs either side of a fireplace and a small table to one side with three chairs, a candle and an unopened deck of cards. On the opposite side of the room is a chaise lounge. RICHARD paces the room. There is a knock on the door. RICHARD opens it to WARBURTON.)

RICHARD Warburton, at last! I have been waiting this hour and more.

WARBURTON I regret I was not able to come before, sir.

RICHARD I make no doubt you travelled back as quickly as possible. Sit down, Warburton, sit down. You found my brother?

WARBURTON I had the felicity of seeing his lordship, sir.

RICHARD He was well? In good spirits? You thought him changed, yes? Aged perhaps, or...

WARBURTON His lordship was not greatly changed, sir.

RICHARD *(enthusiastically)* Come, Warburton, come. Tell me everything. What did he say? Will he take the revenues? Will he?

WARBURTON His lordship, sir, was reluctant to take anything, but upon reflection, he consented to accept his elder son's portion. The revenues of the estate he begs you will make use of.

RICHARD But you told him that I would touch nought belonging to him?

WARBURTON I tried to persuade his lordship, sir, to no avail. He desires you to use Wyncham as you will.

RICHARD I'll not touch his money.

WARBURTON That is as you please, sir. (*pause*) I believe I may set your mind at rest on one score, Mr Carstares: his lordship's situation is tolerably comfortable. He has ample means.

RICHARD But—but he lives by robbery!

WARBURTON So he would have us believe, sir.

RICHARD But 'tis true. He waylaid me!

WARBURTON And robbed you, sir?

RICHARD Rob me? He could not rob his own brother, Warburton.

WARBURTON Your pardon, Mr Carstares. You are right: his lordship could not rob a brother (*pause*). Yet I have known a man do such a thing.

RICHARD What do you mean, Warburton? Why do you look at me like that? Why do you fence with me? In plain words, what do you mean?

WARBURTON I know you, Master Richard, for what you are.

RICHARD You learnt the truth from John. He will expose me...

WARBURTON No, sir. His lordship told me nothing. And he will never expose you.

RICHARD Oh? Then you...

WARBURTON Nor I, sir. I would not speak all these years for your father's sake—now it is for John's.

RICHARD You are fond of John.

WARBURTON Fond of him—? Good God, Master Richard, I have known you both since your infancy and watched you grow into men – I am not fond of John, he is as dear to me as mine own kin.

RICHARD We were always more than mere kin, John and I. We were true blood brothers, inseparable. There was nothing that we would not have done for the other...but I see you cannot bring yourself to believe me.

WARBURTON Once, sir, I was certain of it. Now -

RICHARD Yet 'tis true, Warburton. I would give all in my power to undo that night's work.

WARBURTON You cannot expect me to believe that, sir. It rests with you alone whether his name be cleared or not. And you remain silent.

RICHARD Do you think it means nothing to me that John is outcast?

WARBURTON Master Richard, I want to think the best I can of you. Will you not—can you not explain how it came that you allowed him to bear the blame of your cheat?

RICHARD There's no explanation...no excuse. I forced it on him. On my brother! The thought of it is driving me crazed. I thought I could forget; and then—and then—fate deemed us meet once again. The sight of him brought it all back to me. Ever since that day I have not known how to live and not shout the truth to everyone.

(WARBURTON seats himself at the small table. He plays idly with the unopened deck of cards)

WARBURTON Tell me, sir. What induced you to mark the cards?

RICHARD The whole scene is a nightmare....

(The lighting changes subtly. It is a card room at a party. The candle of the table is lit. JOHN enters and sits on one side of WARBURTON. TRACY enters and sits himself by the fire watching the game. JOHN opens the deck of cards, deals and they begin to play as RICHARD recounts the story. Note: Two scenes are essentially being played out at the same table)

RICHARD I think I must have been mad. John had played Milward before me, and he had won. I remember they laughed at him, saying his luck had turned at last, for he always lost at cards.

(RICHARD sits down at the table opposite JOHN. WARBURTON in the middle, playing as Milward, deals RICHARD into the game)

We played with the same pack that they had used... I heard laughter (*sound of laughter from offstage*), again.... and all the time I was losing ... losing; I knew I could not pay. The pin of my cravat fell out on to my knee. I think no one saw it. As I picked it up the thought that I should mark the cards flashed into my mind—I should have banished it, I know. I scarce knew what I was about. I— no, I must be honest, if only this once. It was my debt to Gundry. My father would not meet it and I had to find the money. There was no way I could not face the scandal. I was mad for Lavinia and the scandal would take her from me. I held the ace of clubs in my hand: I scratched it with my pin. It was easily done. Too easily done. By degrees I marked all four, and three of the kings.

WARBURTON Did no-one notice sir?

RICHARD No one noticed, but I was nervous. My hands were trembling. I dared do no more. Soon I began to win.

JOHN It appears my luck is out again, gentlemen.

RICHARD There was more laughter (*sound of laughter*). Then Tracy Belmanoir came across the room to watch our play.

(TRACY stands and moves behind RICHARD's chair. TRACY watches the game intently, his hands on the back of RICHARD's chair)

From that moment, the nightmare unfolded. Tracy stood behind me watching.... I could feel him there, hovering, like a moth drawn to flame.... I don't know how long he stayed like that, it seemed hours, but I could feel his eyes... I played the ace of hearts. *(RICHARD plays the marked ace of hearts and the other players are disappointed at having lost.)*

TRACY One moment... *(TRACY reaches over and picks up the card, taking his time to examine it closely in the light)*

RICHARD And in that one moment...

TRACY I do believe this card is marked... and Carstares' luck has turned?

WARBURTON Why did you not speak up?

RICHARD Because they laughed at him. I thought his observation would be lost amongst it. But I saw them exchange glances—they were wondering.

WARBURTON Then why did you not say something?

RICHARD Because it was too late.

JOHN Do I understand that you accuse me, Belmanoir? Next you will accuse Richard!

TRACY One of you, certainly, or Milward.

RICHARD It was then that everyone realised that one of us three must have marked the cards. Milward was upset, but no one suspected him. It was John—or me. For as long as I live, I shall never forget the horror of those few moments. If I were exposed, it meant the end of my aspirations for Lavinia. I tell you, Warburton, I would have committed any sin at that moment. Nothing would have been too black—I could not bear to lose her. You don't know what she meant to me.

WARBURTON I can guess, sir.

RICHARD No. No one could imagine the depths of my love for her. I think not even John, but...the truth had dawned on him. I got to my

feet (**RICHARD** stands and looks at **JOHN**) And I looked across at him and I damned him with one word; 'John'.

(**RICHARD** sits back down in his chair dejectedly, avoiding **JOHN**'s gaze. **JOHN** stands slowly and looks around the room)

JOHN Gentlemen— (**JOHN** bows to the room) My apologies for being the cause of so unpleasant an incident. Pray give me leave.

(**TRACY** turns and exits. **JOHN** moves to leave. As he passes **RICHARD** he stops and touches his shoulder)

JOHN (quietly, to **RICHARD**) Poor Richard. (**JOHN** exits)

(The light changes back to that of the sitting room)

RICHARD I had damned him with his own name. God forgive me, I prayed that he might take the blame on himself, but when I saw that hurt, wistful little smile on his lips, I nearly blurted out the whole truth.

WARBURTON Yet you said nothing?

RICHARD My cowardice had consumed me.

(**WARBURTON** blows his nose noisily)

RICHARD You know what happened afterwards. You know how my father turned John out penniless, how his friends shunned him. You know my poor mother's grief. And you know that he went away and that we could not find him when she died.... His last words to me before he disappeared were: 'Make Lavinia happy—and try to forget all this'. Forget it! There is not a day when I do not relive that night. I heard nothing further of him until two months ago, when he—waylaid me. He grasped my hand and laughed! It was so dark, I could scarce see him. I only had time to demand his address, and then he was off, galloping away over the heath.

WARBURTON But, if all this is true, why do you not speak to clear his name now? Surely—

RICHARD Now I may not drag my wife's name through the mud. By clearing him, I ruin her.

Scene 3: Introducing the Lady Lavinia Carstares.

(The same sitting room. **RICHARD** now sits at the small table, writing. The door opens and Lady **LAVINIA** Carstares enters. She paces about trying to get **RICHARD**'s attention. Unsuccessful, she throws herself dramatically into a chair by the fire)

LAVINIA (peevishly) Why so serious, Dicky? Why do you not talk to me?

RICHARD Am I, my dear? I crave your pardon. Warburton has just been. He has seen him.

LAVINIA Seen whom?

RICHARD John. And he will have none of it. He asks me to be his steward and to use Wyncham as I will. He is very generous.

LAVINIA Oh? How splendid! And will you, Richard?

RICHARD You know that is out of the question. Warburton says he is not much changed.

LAVINIA (pretending to stifle a yawn) Oh?

RICHARD He says he does not think that John bears me any ill-will. If it were not for you, my dear, I would tell the truth. I believe I shall go crazed if I do not.

LAVINIA Richard!

RICHARD You need have no fear, I do not suppose that I have the courage to face them all now, after seven years.

LAVINIA You will not do it, Richard? Promise! I could not bear the disgrace of it; promise me you will never do it.

RICHARD No, I cannot promise that.

LAVINIA (becoming hysterical) Then you mean to do it? You want to disgrace me! You do not care how you hurt me by holding this threat over my head so cruelly! You—

RICHARD Lavinia, for heaven's sake! Calm yourself!

LAVINIA I will not! Oh yes, yes; You think me a shrew! I know! I know! But you need not frown on me, sir, for you are worse. No, I will not hush. I am a horrid woman, yes, but you are a cheat—a cheat!

RICHARD Lavinia!

LAVINIA No—no! Leave me alone -you make me miserable! You refuse me everything that I want most, and then you threaten to disgrace me—

RICHARD That is untrue! I cannot promise to stay silent, that is all. What have I refused you that was within my means to give you? God knows you try your best to ruin me—

LAVINIA There! There! 'Tis I who am to blame? Pray, did you not induce my lord to leave his money to John when you knew he would have willed it all to you, had you but kept silent? You took no thought to me—

RICHARD For heaven's sake, Lavinia, be still. You do not know what you are saying.

LAVINIA (*pressing her hands to her cheeks*) No—I am unreasonable. I know it, but don't **tell** me so, for I cannot bear it. And don't look reproach at me, Richard. You drive me mad I tell you! (*pause*) Say something, Richard. **Do** something! Don't stand there so quietly. Oh, you should never have married me! I displease you, and you make me worse; do you not see how 'tis that I cannot live without pleasure, and money. I am despicable – Yes! Yes! But what are you? Oh, why did you tell me you cheated **after** you had wedded me? (*She sobs angrily into her handkerchief*)

(**RICHARD** *looking ashamed turns his back to LAVINIA*)

LAVINIA Don't do that! Don't! Don't! You make me worse by your dreadful silence! Oh, if you really loved me!

(**RICHARD** *turns quickly to face LAVINIA*)

RICHARD (*emphatically*) You cannot doubt that! (**RICHARD** *moves to LAVINIA*) You know how I love you, don't you?

LAVINIA Oh, yes, yes! You do love me, don't you Dicky? (*she twines her arms about his neck*)

RICHARD (*wearily*) God help me, yes. And you—you care for no one save yourself.

LAVINIA No! Do not say that, Dicky. Indeed, I do love you, but I cannot live without gaiety—you know I cannot. I do not doubt that I am very selfish, but 'tis the way I am fashioned, and I cannot change my nature. And now I have hurt you, and I did not mean to! Really, I did not mean to.

RICHARD My dear, I know you did not; but you are so uncontrolled, so—

LAVINIA I knew you would say that. You do not understand me. You expect me to be good, and patient, and forbearing, and I tell you 'tis not in my nature.

RICHARD (*gently*) But, Lavinia, can you not control your passions?

LAVINIA No, I cannot. While I now bear your name, I was born a Belmanoir, and —as God made us, so we are— He made us spendthrift, and pleasure-loving, and mad! But you do not understand, and you try to make me staid, and thoughtful, and a good mother, when I am dying for **life**, and excitement, and care not for housewifery. And now my head aches, and you look grave and say 'tis my wicked temper, when I want you to be sorry, and to be ready to do anything to comfort me. Why can you not take me to London, when you know how I long to be there, instead of in this gloomy house with nought to do, save mind my child and my needle? I am so tired of it all, so very tired of it all.

RICHARD You are unhappy, Lavinia?

LAVINIA Unhappy? No, I am dull. I am ill-tempered. I am discontented. Do not be sad, Richard. I cannot bear you to be solemn. Take me to London and never mind if I **do** squander all your money. Say you do not care. Say that nothing matters so long as I am happy. Why do you not say it? Be wild! Be reckless! Be anything rather than grave and old. (*Her arms creep round his neck*) Please Dicky, take me to London.

RICHARD My dear, I will take you, but not just yet. There is so much to be done here. If you will wait a little longer—

LAVINIA If I will wait! If I will be patient and good - but I cannot! — you don't understand!

RICHARD I am sorry. I promise I will take you as soon as possible, and we will stay as long as you please. (*Her arms fall away*)

LAVINIA I want to go now.

RICHARD Dear Lavinia -

LAVINIA Very well—very well. We will go presently. Only do not reason with me.

RICHARD (*concerned*) You are overwrought, my love—

LAVINIA Yes, oh yes; Leave me a while so I may rest. Forgive me, Dicky. I will be good one day.

Scene 4: His Grace of Andover

(The same sitting room. **LAVINIA** sits waiting in a chair with a piece of needlework. **TRACY** enters)

LAVINIA Tracy! (**LAVINIA** stands and holds her hands out)

TRACY I rejoice to find you within, Lavinia. Did you get my letter?
(**TRACY** bows over **LAVINIA**'s hands and kisses them)

LAVINIA Oh Tracy, I was so vastly delighted to have it.

TRACY I am indeed honoured. I am come on a sufficiently important matter.

LAVINIA Oh? (pause) Money (**LAVINIA** pulls her hands away and sits down ungracefully while **TRACY** elegantly takes the seat opposite)

TRACY Your most noble lord and master lent me a trifling sum the other day, but very trifling. I am, as usual, hard-pressed. And that young fool Andrew must needs fall into debt.

LAVINIA Do you tell me you need money from Richard to pay Andrew's debts?

TRACY I do not.

LAVINIA Well, in any case, Andrew borrowed three thousand from poor Richard only yesterday. I know, because I heard him speak of it.

TRACY How unnecessary of Andrew, and how typical. So 'poor Richard' has been squeezed already?

LAVINIA Don't speak like that, Tracy. Richard is good to me.

TRACY Now this becomes interesting. Since when have you come to that conclusion? And why this sudden loyalty?

LAVINIA I have **always** been loyal to him, Tracy! You know I have! I worry him—and indeed he is very forbearing.

TRACY But how charming of him

LAVINIA Do not sneer, Tracy! He has promised to take me to London for the whole winter—

TRACY Now I understand, I was at a loss before.

LAVINIA 'Tis not that, Tracy, indeed. I realise how kind Richard is to me. And we have quarrelled again. We are always quarrelling, and I know 'tis all my fault.

TRACY What a comfortable conviction, my dear

LAVINIA It is not comfortable, Tracy. I cannot change my disposition, though I **mean** to be patient and sweet. Oh Tracy, how I hate it here at Wyncham.

TRACY You, hate Wyncham? There was a time—

LAVINIA I know, I know. But I never meant to live here always like this. 'Tis all so gloomy after his father's death. I want to go to London.

TRACY I thought you said you were going?

LAVINIA Yes, I am. But I want to go with someone who is merry – and not—not—

TRACY Not the amiable Richard? Well, I can conceive that life with him might prove uninspiring. Safe, my dear, but not exciting.

LAVINIA I knew you would understand. You see, he does not like me to play at cards, because I cannot stop. And he cannot see how 'tis that I care nought for what he calls 'home-life' when there are routs, and the play, and **real** life. He is so—so **staid**, Tracy, and careful.

TRACY A good trait in a husband, Lavinia. 'Tis because I do not possess it that I am single now.

LAVINIA No, Tracy, that is not so. It is because you are a devil! No sane woman would marry you.

TRACY That is most interesting, my dear, but hardly original. Pray, confine your analysis to that of Richard's sterling character.

LAVINIA 'Tis only that we are so different. I always desire to do things quickly—if I think of something, I want it at once. And he likes to wait and think on it, and—oh, 'tis so tiresome, and it puts me in a bad humour. When he speaks to me in that gentle, reasoning way, I could scream. Tracy, do you think I am mad?

TRACY No, but the next thing to it: a Belmanoir. Perhaps it was a pity you ever married Richard. But there is always the money.

LAVINIA There is not.

TRACY Not? What mean you?

TRACY You think the former lord left his money to Dick?

TRACY Certainly. He should be stupendously wealthy.

LAVINIA He is not.

TRACY But the revenues must be enormous. He has the land, surely?

LAVINIA No, he has not. I am angry whenever I think on it. He induced my lord to leave it to John. **He** has but his younger son's portion.

TRACY I still fail to understand. You informed me that the Earl left all to Richard?

LAVINIA He changed his will, Tracy!

TRACY He changed his will? Then, my dear, must you have played your cards very badly.

LAVINIA 'Twas not my fault —indeed 'twas not. I knew nought until the will was read. Richard never spoke a word to me about it. And now we are comparatively poor.

TRACY I always knew, of course, that Dick was a fool, but I never guessed how much so 'till now.

LAVINIA He is not a fool. He is an honest man. Oh, why is it that I do not love him more? 'Tis we—**we**, I tell you—who are mean and despicable and mercenary.

TRACY Undoubtedly, Lavinia, but pray do not excite yourself over it. I suppose he is still devoted to his brother?

LAVINIA Yes, yes—'tis all John, John, John, until I am sick to death of the sound of his name—

TRACY 'Tis most unfortunate. It seems you had better have chosen John, in spite of it all. The situation strikes me as rather amusing. To think of the worthy Richard so neatly overturning all my plans.

LAVINIA If it had not been for you, I might never have married him. Why did you throw them both in my way? Why did I ever set eyes on either?

TRACY It should have been a good match, my dear, and, if I remember rightly, no one was more alive to that fact than yourself. Still, I admit that for the smart lot we are, we do seem rather to have bungled the affair.