

Scene 1

AMBER Hum Hum, Hum hum hum-hum
Hum Hum, Hum hum hum hum
Himmler had something similar.
Hum Hum, Had no hum hum-hum.

(EDGAR ENTERS DRAMATICALLY)

AMBER Edgar.. Edgar.. Is that you, dearest Edgar.

EDGAR I'm sorry my dear, I didn't mean to startle you, bursting in like this.

AMBER You look so troubled. Is there something the matter?

EDGAR Yes. I'm afraid there is.

AMBER What is it, Edgar? Please tell me.

EDGAR I have some things to tell you. Things which, I'm afraid, may make you hate and despise me for ever.

AMBER Oh Edgar, don't be silly. You know I love you. Nothing you can say can ever change that.

EDGAR I wish it were so.

AMBER It will be so, dearest. You needn't worry

EDGAR I'm afraid, Amber, I have not been perfectly honest with you about.. well, about everything really.

AMBER It doesn't matter my sweet. Soon we'll be married and honeymooning in your little cottage in the country. We'll just forget things that have happened in the past. Once we move into Castle Howard and start..

EDGAR I don't own Castle Howard.

AMBER What? Don't be silly, of course you do. We've been there dozens of times. You showed me round.

EDGAR No. The truth is we were merely.. visitors. I bought the tickets at the main gate when you weren't looking. That man who showed you round - he wasn't my butler. He was just a guide.

AMBER But.. but what about all your cousins - from the short side of the family?

EDGAR Just Japanese tourists, I'm afraid. When I said my parents lived there.. I was not telling the truth.

AMBER But we met them.

EDGAR They were just waxwork dummies. I am, as you know, I am an expert ventriloquist.

AMBER They did think they seemed rather formal. I thought it was just because they were upper class.

EDGAR No. In reality, my parents are just two ordinary working-class folk. They live in a terraced house in the town. At least they did, until it burned down..

AMBER Oh Edgar.

EDGAR I couldn't let you find out about them...

AMBER You don't mean..

EDGAR Yes. It was me who set fire to the house. It was all I could think of doing. Of course I didn't mean the whole terrace to go up, or the hospital.. or the paint factory. Things just got out of hand.

AMBER But your parents.. They must be homeless

EDGAR Oh no, no, no, don't worry. They were still in the house when I nailed up the door. Oh Amber, can you ever forgive me, darling.

AMBER What's in the past doesn't matter, Edgar. It's the future, that's the important thing. We'll put all this behind us - when there's just the two of us in our little cottage..

EDGAR There is no cottage.

AMBER What?

EDGAR The cottage doesn't exist. I drew it on an old Christmas card with a biro..

AMBER No cottage.

EDGAR No cottage, my darling. You see, I just wanted us to be happy. I didn't think you could love me if you knew I had nothing, no stately home, no cottage, no servants.

AMBER I don't care. Nothing matters but our love. Once we're married..

EDGAR I'm already married.

AMBER Well. Alright. Once you've got your divorce..

EDGAR ...and I may not have mentioned that I'm a promiscuous homosexual and an opium addict.

AMBER Yes, but once you had some treatment..

EDGAR And then of course there's the serial killings..

AMBER Oh Edgar, everyone's allowed one mistake.

EDGAR More like seventeen, really... And the orphanage but that was a complete accident

AMBER People can change. People can make new lives for themselves. Anything is possible..

EDGAR You mean, after all that, you still love me.

AMBER Of course I do. But..

EDGAR But. I knew they'd be a 'but'.

AMBER I must be sure you've told me everything. I can't marry you until I'm sure I know everything. You owe me that at least.

EDGAR Yes, yes, I'm sure I have. But, just in case, let me check my *list* (*TAKES LIST FROM POCKET AND READS*) Castle Howard yes, parents yes, arson yes, bigamy yes, Homosexuality yes, serial killings yes, false title yes..

AMBER Just a minute.

EDGAR What?

AMBER Did you say 'false title'?

EDGAR Yes. Is that a particular problem?

AMBER You mean to say, you're not Lord Bratwurst.

EDGAR No. I'm afraid not.

AMBER So I won't be Lady Bratwurst.

EDGAR No. My given name is actually Sausage. Edgar Sausage.

AMBER Then that'll make me..

EDGAR Mrs Sausage. But it doesn't matter darling. What does a name matter, as long as we're together?

AMBER How could you do this to me?

EDGAR Do what? What have I done?

AMBER How could you wrong me so. Such grievous deception...

EDGAR It was just a little white lie.

AMBER Black!

EDGAR I beg your Pardon.

AMBER Black! It was the blackest lie that has ever been told. You have cast the ship of my hopes on the stormy rocks of broken dreams. You and I are finished. You can take back this 22 carat diamond ring.

EDGAR (*SULLENLY*) Doesn't matter - got it out of a cracker anyway.

AMBER Take back this ring. Leave this house immediately and I never want to see you as long as I shall live.

EDGAR So the engagement's off, is it?

AMBER You have turned my heart to stone. Our love has become so much ashes and dust.

EDGAR (*GATHERING HIMSELF*) Very well. I thought it might come to this. I have already purchased this one way ticket to Tierra Del Fuego where I will live out the rest of days observing the mating pattern of the white-gilled lizards. It won't be easy - mainly because there are no white-gilled lizards on Tierra Del Fuego - but it won't matter because all I will ever do is think about you hoping against hope that one day you'll find it in your heart to forgive me. Will you leave me just that one faint hope.

AMBER Are you still here?

EDGAR (*WALKING OUT OF THE DOOR*) I see you have hardened your heart. I will waste no more of your time. Can I just say...

 (*DOOR IS SLAMMED IN HIS FACE*)

EDGAR (*MUFFLED*) ...someday you'll make someone a beautiful wife.

AMBER (*GOES OVER TO THE WRITING DESK, SITS AND TAKES UP THE QUILL PEN AND BEGINS TO WRITE*) And now I have no choice but to sit here looking sad but stoic, gazing into the middle distance and writing plucky letters to my non-existent cousin. (*WRITES*) 'Dear Esmerelda, Once again I have been terribly, terribly let down. Even worse than when I discovered that Lionel was a dwarf walking on stilts.'

(SAD PIANO MUSIC FADED IN)

AMBER Is there not a single honest and good man out there worthy of my love. Is there not someone who can help me rediscover trust and purity. Surely somewhere, somehow such a man must exist. *(PAUSE)* And just to cap it all that bastard upstairs has started playing the piano again

(FADE.EXIT AMBER. LIGHTS ENTER AMBER AND HER MOTHER)

MOTHER Amber darling, I was so sorry to hear that the engagement to Edgar is off. Are you sure he had no money?

AMBER Not a penny.

MOTHER Men are cruel and deceiving creatures, Amber. It is just as well you have learned this lesson so early in life. Unfortunately I must convey more bad news.

AMBER Don't tell me Timmy is dead. I couldn't bear it. That little dog meant everything to me.

MOTHER Well perhaps it would be better then if you hadn't thrown it out of your window.

AMBER I did no such thing.

MOTHER We were strolling in the garden Amber. We saw everything.

AMBER It was an accident. He slipped from my grasp.

MOTHER He landed in the pond. That's 30 yards away from your window.

AMBER They said that dogs always land on their feet

MOTHER That's cats dear, cats always land on their feet. Dogs don't. Particularly if you throw them long distances. Anyway my news is not regarding Timmy. I'm afraid the bad news is in relation to your dear father.

AMBER Oh mummy, don't be silly, I already know he's dead. I saw him in the coffin.

MOTHER That is not the bad news.

AMBER It was just lucky he fell onto that naked chambermaid after his heart attack or goodness knows what might have happened.

MOTHER Your father was a good man, Amber. Good but flawed. You see he had one small weakness. He couldn't stay away from the gambling table.

AMBER Perhaps his trousers were caught under the leg.

MOTHER No, Amber, you must really try and concentrate on what I'm saying. I know you can't help being stupid but it does make these conversations interminable. Your father – the man who used to live here with us – was a gambler – a man who wagers large sums of money at cards – and as a result we have no money. Do you understand – we... have... no... money.

AMBER But what do we need money for mummy – we have a big house and lots of servants and the cook buys everything we need.

MOTHER Amber, do you remember when all the servants went off in those carriages.

AMBER They were just having a day off. I told you not to give them a day off. It makes them slack.

MOTHER They were leaving Amber. And had you not noticed that all the furniture is covered in white sheets.

AMBER I thought they'd died. Like Daddy.

MOTHER Amber, we are leaving the estate and are going to live in a small cottage in the country. Even that we can barely afford. Our only hope is if we can find a husband for you. Otherwise we are destined to live our life in penury.

AMBER You know I hate Penury mother – all those old houses.

MOTHER The one ace we hold Amber is that you are very very pretty and you have a divine body. If we can just marry you off to some member of the aristocracy before they realise how stupid you are, we'll be home and dry.

AMBER Don't forget my accomplishments.

MOTHER Your what?

AMBER My accomplishments. I can colour in pictures, I can tie my shoelaces, I can play the gramophone.

MOTHER God preserve us.

AMBER Don't worry mummy. I'll find us a man. Or maybe a prince in a fairy castle.

MOTHER Amber look at me. The stories in the books. Somebody... made... them... up... They're... not... real...

AMBER I know that. I'm not completely stupid. But the ones with pictures they must be real. How else would they draw the pictures.

MOTHER I'm losing the will to live. Amber, if you can't find a rich man to marry, you and I are going to have to go out in the world and earn a living. I will be a governess and there must be an opening out there somewhere for a beautiful but shallow and unintelligent lass like yourself.

AMBER I could marry a football.

MOTHER Football... er. The word is footballer for God's sake. Wait a minute. What's this. (*SHE FINDS A LETTER STICKING THROUGH THE LETTER BOX. SHE OPENS IT AND BEGINS READING*)

Dear Mrs Ambergris, Blah Blah Blah. Lord Wensleydale Lord Looking for new secretary. Blah Blah Blah. Start Immediately. Blah Blah Blah. 10 pounds a week. Blah Blah Blah. Yours sincerely. Blah Blah Blah.

AMBER Honestly mother, what a terrible letter! Why did they keep writing blah, blah, blah. Don't they know any other words.

MOTHER I was abbreviating.

AMBER Shall I call the doctor?

MOTHER No dear. Now listen, this could be the one chance you'll have of nabbing a lord.

AMBER But don't I need to be pure for my wedding?

MOTHER All you have to do is to pretend that you can take shorthand and write letters.

AMBER I can write letters. About from S obviously.

MOTHER Right my girl. Upstairs with you. We need to get you ready to meet Lord Wensleydale. And this time Amber, don't mess up.

(*EXIT. FADE. LIGHTS UP RUTTOCKS WHO WHISTLES A FOLKY VERSION OF AN ENTIRELY INAPPROPRIATE CURRENT HIT*)

AMBER (*FROM THE OFFSTAGE*) Good morning. Good morning.

(*RUTTOCKS CONTINUES WHISTLING*)

AMBER (*ENTERS*) Excuse me.

RUTTOCKS What! What! Oh, you startled me, young miss, creeping up on me like that.

AMBER I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make you jump.

RUTTOCKS You must be young Miss Amber what's come to work for the young master, as 'is secretary.

AMBER Yes, that's right.

RUTTOCKS And what recently had a disappointment in love on account of getting involved with a right smooth sort who turned out to be a bad'n with not a penny to 'is name. And you been left a bit depressed like.

AMBER Well, yes, that is true I suppose.

RUTTOCKS And you been thinking that coming to work for the young master might give you a fresh start like. A chance to reflect on what might have been and to mend the pieces of a broken heart.

AMBER I hadn't looked at it quite like that. But you're right - I suppose you could say that I'm running away from myself.

RUTTOCKS You can't run away from yourself my dear. Many's tried. None managed. That's life for yer.

AMBER Is that Mr Wensleydale, up there at the window?

RUTTOCKS Aye. That be 'im. Young master Clayton. 'e's a hard man, but fair. D'you know 'e shot my dog last week, but 'e never should 'a' been on that lawn. If I tells 'im once I tells 'im a dozen times. Keep off the grass, you dozy dog.

AMBER Does he always stand...and stare like that.

RUTTOCKS Only for these last few months. It were different before then. I remember when this house were full of gaiety and laughter. They used to dance till dawn them young 'uns. Mad they was. Parties. Why there weren't a Sunday morning when we weren't dredging the lake for some young thing what drank too much champagne and drowned. Cer, times they were.

AMBER Don't they have parties any more?

RUTTOCKS Not any more, miss. That house ain't seen a party for a year gone. I's like an empty shell now. Full of empty echoes and long silences. It ain't been the same since Miss Jessica died.

AMBER Who was Miss Jessica?

RUTTOCKS His fiance of course, don't you know. The light of 'is life she were. I remembers how they used to trip through the woods picking wild

flowers. Like a couple of lambs in spring they was. Now he picks flowers on his own, To put on her grave...

AMBER She died then..

RUTTOCKS (*ANGRILY*) How d'you know that? You been peekin' and a pryin' into'm 'is masters business. Poking your nose in where it ain't wanted..

AMBER No, No. It's just you mentioned her grave. So I just assumed she must be dead.

RUTTOCKS (*CALMING*) Ah, Ah, well. I see. That be different. You'll 'ave to forgive me. This last year ain't been easy for none of us.

AMBER What happened to Miss Jessica?

RUTTOCKS 'e shot 'er.

AMBER What - did she go on the lawn too?

RUTTOCKS Oh no, no, no. It were an accident. She were wandering though the long grass on 'er own. 'e mistook 'er for a deer. She moved like a deer, see. Lovely shot it was mind. Got 'er right 'ere. between the eyes. 'e never misses, the master.

AMBER How awful. He must have felt terrible.

RUTTOCKS Ah. 'e did that. 'e's never forgiven 'i'self.

AMBER But why does he stare at that picture like that - it's so creepy.

RUTTOCKS Ah well, you see, the woman in that picture, that's 'er - Miss Jessica. Paid a fortune to 'ave it done 'e did. (*SINISTERLY*) O' course there's worse upstairs, in his bedroom, but you don't want to know about that.

AMBER What do you mean?

RUTTOCKS Oh nuthin, nuthin.

AMBER But what's this 'worse upstairs'.

RUTTOCKS Oh don't you worry my dear. I's just a sayin' we 'ave in these parts. 'There's worse upstairs when er.. when er.. when the sky's red at night.

AMBER But that's complete gibberish.

RUTTOCKS Aye, but you gotta remember, folk round 'ere marry their cousins, miss.

AMBER I should never have come here. I've made a terrible mistake.

RUTTOCKS Oh no, no miss. I's not good thinking like that. You see, you 'ad to come. 'is as if you was drawn 'ere like a moth to a candle. *(PAUSE)* And don't take you take no notice of what 'e says my dear, 'e don't mean no 'arm. 'e's got a good 'eart underneath it all. Even if he is a complete bastard, 'e don't mean to be. 'as just 'is way. You just get yourself up to that house now my dear. And don't you worry about a thing.

(FADE. LIGHTS UP ON CLAYTON STARING AT A PICTURE. AMBER ENTERS)

AMBER *(CLEARS HER THROAT SEVERAL TIMES)*

CLAYTON What's the matter with you woman? Have you got some sort of disease?

AMBER No. I just didn't want to startle you.

CLAYTON I don't like weak women. She never had a days' illness. Strong as an ox, she was.

AMBER My name's Amber.

CLAYTON *(FLATLY)* Is it?

AMBER Amber Vertigris.

CLAYTON How splendid for you.

AMBER I came in - the door was open.

CLAYTON Well it would be wouldn't it, woman. Unless you have the ability to walk through woodwork.

AMBER I'm your secretary.

CLAYTON No you're not. My secretary's an old woman. She's worked for me for years. She's called Winnie - or something.

AMBER She retired. I'm your new secretary. The agency sent me.

CLAYTON No-one ever tells me anything. You're rather plain aren't you. I specifically asked the agency for someone pretty.

AMBER Does it matter what I look like - if I'm just to be your secretary. Anyway, I have been told I'm rather attractive.

CLAYTON Really! There's no accounting for taste!

AMBER No. Many people have complemented me.

CLAYTON Yes, well. The world is full of lunatics these days. You're rather fat too, aren't you.

AMBER No I'm not.

CLAYTON Still, it doesn't matter to me what you look like. It wouldn't interest me if you looked like a baboon. I don't care what anybody looks like anymore.

AMBER If that was the case, why did you ask the agency for someone pretty?

CLAYTON (*WISTFULLY*) Who knows? To let a shaft of light into this dark place, I suppose. (*PAUSE. ACCUSINGLY*) You think my life's easy don't you.

AMBER No.

CLAYTON (*IGNORING HER*) ...just because I've got millions of pounds and I'm ridiculously handsome. Just because a person is virtually perfect doesn't necessarily make them happy, you know. Sometimes I wish I was dull and plain and ordinary... like you