

5 The governess is dragged, book in hand, into the schoolroom by the children.
Mrs Grose exits with tea things.

Scene Four.

1840

The schoolroom.

Miles: You will permit us to perform the scene we've learned for you, won't you?

Governess: Miles, I was reading.

Miles: Oh, boring.

Flora: Please please let us. We've rehearsed it 'specially for you.

Miles: I've directed it and (*producing a horse head mask*) designed it and everything.

Governess: I wonder sometimes whether you're really a child at all, dear Miles.

Miles: Say yes.

Governess: Yes!

Flora squeaks in triumph, and sets the music box to play.

Miles: (*Directing the governess*) Right, you must sit there. This will be the stage, you see? Now (*putting on his horse mask*) I play Bottom.

Flora: And I play Titania. (*Lies down*).

Governess: Oh, brava, Flora.

Flora: Shh, I'm asleep. (*Sleeps*).

Miles: (*As Bottom, holding the lit candle*) 'Why do they run away? This is to make an ass of me, to fright me, if they could. But I will walk up and down, and I will sing, that they shall hear I'm not afraid'. (*Sings*).

Flora: (*Waking up*) 'What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?'

Miles/Bottom is startled and stops singing.

(*continued*) 'I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again. Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note. So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape. And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me to swear I love thee'.

Miles: 'Methinks, you should have little reason for that, and yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays'.

Flora: 'Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful'.

Miles: 'Not so. But if I had wit enough to get out of this wood –'

Flora: 'Therefore, go with me. / I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee / and I will purge thy mortal grossness so / that thou shalt like an airy spirit go'.

Miles and Flora exit dramatically together. The governess, delighted, applauds. She waits for the children to come back 'on' for a curtain call, but they don't. Initially she's amused, assuming a little trick is being played.

Governess: I see. Highly amusing. I see their knavery! 'This is to make an ass of me, to fright me' indeed! Children?

She becomes concerned. Lights change subtly – becoming dimmer and more shadowy. The governess picks up Miles' candle to investigate, but can see neither child. The music box, having been bright and cheerful, sounds discordant.

(continued) Flora? Miles? Mrs Grose? *(Scared)* Alright, that's enough.

A sharp but unidentifiable noise – like someone far off screaming. The governess gasps.

(continued) Come. I command you...

There's another sudden jagged pulse of sound and Quint appears. She immediately senses him and turns to face him.

Scene Five.

Carrying his own candle, Quint approaches her until he is close. She is terrified and remains rooted to the spot. This time, there's nothing ghostly about him. Instead he's a living, detestable, dangerous presence.

Neither of them move. There's an intensity between them which could go any way and the provocation is not entirely on his side. There's a sexual element to it.

Terror recedes, but not intensity. For a moment, it looks as if she will move towards him, even somehow offer herself to him. Their bodies seem drawn together. Something breaks. He withdraws. She has, at least, outfaced him. He slinks off. His candle is extinguished. He's gone.

She breathes again, conflicted and overwhelmed. She retraces the steps to her bedroom with the only light her candle. She believes herself to be home and dry until there's a voice from a source too dimly lit to identify, at least at first.

Flora: *(A spine-chilling voice, not of a child)* You naughty! Where have you been?