



THE
LULWORTH
MERMAID

Screenplay by

Steve Besford

3 Victoria Crescent
Horsforth
Leeds
LS18 4PT
0776 0400 876
stevebesford@hotmail.com

EXT. UNDERWATER, OCEAN - NIGHT

The dark muteness of OCEAN WATER, pierced by DULL FINGERS OF MOONLIGHT.

Visibility is poor - mists and particles fog what little view there is.

The quiet Dorset voice of BETHIA (9)...

BETHIA

I can only tell 'ee what I believe.
What I think is true.

There is a GLINT of something in the water - a movement like a sparkled ghost.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

I dussen care if 'ee believe it.

A FLASH this time of something alive in the water - twisting away.

TITLES. SUPER.

The shafts of MOONLIGHT multiply in the water...

DISSOLVE TO:

-brightening into SUNLIGHT before -

We surface so that we look inland at THE PERFECT HORSESHOE OF LULWORTH COVE, Dorset.

SUPER: "Lulworth, Dorset, 1816"

INT. COMMON ROOM, WORKER'S COTTAGE - DAY

Super close on a LENGTH OF WHITE THREAD as it snakes across a bed of similar threads. Pull out to see A CHILD'S FINGER AND THUMB pinched around a DULL IRON NEEDLE as it pierces down through a tiny patch of stitching.

The needle returns to pierce the surface of the stitching from the underside and the fingers work the metal so that the eye pulls the thread to sit neatly alongside another stitch.

Reveal the thread is part of a 'spoke' of WHEEL-LIKE CIRCLE. The circle is about an inch in diameter held closely between finger and thumb - This is a handmade DORSET BUTTON.

The indifferent eyes of BETHIA (9) look down on her work.

Her hand holds the button up for final inspection. A loop of thread is not pulled through - an imperfection. She frowns in frustration. Her eyes dart to the side to reveal...

- her mother JANE (late 30s) as she sits silently sewing without distraction. This is work. This is a living.

Bethia looks carefully to see if her mother is watching before she stretches forward with the button and drops it...

...onto a PILE OF OTHER WHITE DORSET BUTTONS, sitting on a WOODEN TRAY.

The room is the only downstairs space in a stout Dorset cottage: KITCHEN and FIREPLACE, workspace and a DOOR TO THE UPSTAIRS. Light from the SMALL WINDOWS does not reach into the far corners of the room. The low ceiling presses down.

Bethia turns back to her mother, but the look is not returned as Jane focuses on her work.

There is a moment. Bethia continues to stare - willing something. Jane carries on as long as she can before stopping abruptly. She lets out a long sigh...

JANE
(without looking)
Go!

-- a flurry as Bethia launches herself from her chair.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia bursts from the door, sprints into the lane that runs through West Lulworth, the main village inland from the cove.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia darts down a stony track by the side of some fields, before finding a farmer's gate. A sense of ritual. THE AFTERNOON SUN is almost at magic hour.

Without a beat, she hauls the hem of her gown up and climbs the gate, before jumping off into the field beyond.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia runs up the HILL, breathless.

She sees A FIGURE, SILHOUETTED BY THE LOW SUN, at the brow of the hill above her.

She stops a moment to beam broadly before - head down - dashing on...

-- she crashes into the tall broad-shouldered ELIJAH (late 30s) her father. CROOK in one hand, he stoops down to embrace her with his free arm, and she burrows into him.

ELIJAH
Still small enough, little lamb.

BETHIA
Always.

He stands and, with her under his arm, strolls down the hill.

INT. RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - TWILIGHT

The doors open to a DRAWING ROOM of the hall and A YOUNG WOMAN DRESSED IN MAID'S LIVERY emerges, drying her wet eyes with her sleeve, before exiting to reveal -

- A TALL-WELL DRESSED MAN, mature, looking out to the hall where she has departed.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE FRONT - TWILIGHT

The maid walks down the drive of the lamp-lit grand manor. Her face begins to crease with tears, but she tries hard to wipe her eyes as she goes - a futile, messy business.

This is SUSANNAH (17), elder sister to Bethia.

The silhouette of the tall well-dressed man looks out of the window in her direction.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Elijah and Bethia are seated around a SMALL WOODEN TABLE that occupies another corner of the shared living area, near to the hearth.

Without word, Jane brings a POT OF STEW to the table and ladles out a serving to each of the others before serving herself. Elijah smiles at Bethia in the awkward silence.

Finally, Jane sits at the table. There is a sense of something missing. Elijah looks to her for an answer. She briefly catches his eye and sees the question in his look.

JANE

They keep her at the house. I've no
idea when she comes.

Elijah frowns before he clasps his hands together in prayer.
Bethia mirrors her father exactly, Jane acquiesces.

ELIJAH

For what we are to receive, may the
Lord make us thankful. Amen.

Jane and Bethia murmur their Amens, and then the three of
them begin to eat in silence -

- THE DOOR OPENS AND SLAMS - they turn to see SUSANNAH in the
doorway, eyes ablaze and already cornered in her own home. In
the candlelight, she looks harrowed and beaten.

Without a word, she moves to clutch the table and sits down
to eat. Elijah looks at her as if to say something but
retreats. After a time, Jane stands to serve her the stew.

Without enthusiasm, she stabs at the stew with head bowed.
Bethia stares at Susannah but gets no recognition.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

'Ee did come home straight?

Susannah raises her head in a glance of incredulity, before
nodding wearily and returning to her food.

SUSANNAH

The master did keep me.

Elijah looks to Jane as if to verify what he has heard. Jane
looks to her stew, unyielding.

ELIJAH

(turning back to Susannah)
Ee've forgotten something.

SUSANNAH

Does it matter?

ELIJAH

Only to thy eternal soul.

SUSANNAH

(without looking up)
I stand for a long time at dinner -

ELIJAH
 (evenly but persistent)
 "And he took the seven loaves and
 the fishes /

SUSANNAH
 - I never did hear the master
 mutter Grace /

ELIJAH
 "-and gave thanks, and brake them /

SUSANNAH
 - not once /

ELIJAH
 (outburst)
 SUSANNAH!

There is a moment of tension. Susannah lowers her eyes and after a pause, brings her hands up in prayer.

SUSANNAH
 (quiet)
 For what we are to receive, may the
 Lord make us thankful. Amen.

This seems to satisfy what ever need Elijah had but he still returns to his stew looking disappointed. Jane simply stares at Susannah as she toys with her stew.

Bethia sups gently, not wanting to break the silence.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bethia lies in her bed upstairs, listening to the MUFFLED ARGUMENT OF ELIJAH AND SUSANNAH downstairs.

There is a SLAM OF THE FRONT DOOR.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Elijah walks out from the front door with a lantern, turns into the lane and disappears.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bethia hears STEPS ON THE STAIRS and immediately turns over, tightly closing her eyes in an effort to feign sleep.

Behind her, through the open door we see the blurred figures of first JANE entering the bedroom on the opposite side of the landing and shutting the door.

Moments later, Susannah enters with a candle into the room she shares with her sister.

Bethia's eyes twitch tightly closed...

SUSANNAH
(whispered, o.s.)
Bethia.

Bethia's face contorts as if in panic. It takes extraordinary effort to pretend that you are asleep.

The streaks of tears on Susannah's face glisten in the candlelight as she leans over.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
(desperate)
Bethia! I need to talk to 'ee.

But there is only silence in the small bedroom. Susannah sinks a little before standing up again and bending down to place and blow out the candle on the floor.

She slumps back on the bed and lies beside her sister in the darkness. Bethia tenses her body still further.

Susannah turns her body towards Bethia so the two of them are almost spooning at a distance. She reaches her hand out as if she might touch Bethia's shoulder to wake her up.

Bethia's eye open in the darkness, anxious, a sixth sense...

Susannah's hand hovers before...

She pulls it back and turns over to sob noiselessly.

Bethia listens, eyes darting, to the occasional snuck and sniff.

INT. RED LION INN, LULWORTH - NIGHT

A MAN crashes to a dirty wooden floor, wet with beer.

LOUD CHEERS as he is lifted to his feet by a group of THREE YOUNG MEN who pat him on the back.

This is SAMUEL TIZARD (late 20s), who we would now understand to have learning difficulties but is, in this age, seen as a pliable idiot.

One of the young men steps up and brings his hand down on Sam's shoulders in celebration, grinning feverishly...

This is JAMES (20s), lost boy of Lulworth and Susannah's lover. With his hair and shirt amock, wet with beer and sweat, his handsomeness is veiled by his own ruin.

JAMES

Again!

They all drag Tizard to a table, while he protests.

TIZARD

No - I dussen - James -

The pub appears to be empty, save for the LANDLORD who protests feebly as James and the two others, BILL and ROBERT, deftly lift him up and place him standing on the table.

JAMES

You likes a drink, eh, Sam?

TIZARD

I's had enough now, see. No -

JAMES

- You wants it though, dussen you?

BILL

(bellowing)

Give 'im the yard!

TIZARD

Jus' a little one I want.

JAMES

'Ee wants a little one, eh? Now will you sing? Will you dance?

LANDLORD

The boy's had enough, James.

JAMES

(turning on him)

You keep taking my coin, so I'll be my own judge. Another!

He digs out A COIN from his britches and throws it at the bar. The landlord senses potential violence and thinks better of challenging James, tugs the hand pull to produce A BEER.

Turning back to Tizard, James gestures to the ale on the bar.

JAMES (CONT'D)

There it is, Samuel my boy! Now
sing! And 'ee shall 'ave it.

Tizard flinches, eyes darting, a raw nerve of a man. He starts to sing - the tune rattles inside like a bee in a jar.

TIZARD

(singing)

"Oh! Betty have you seen my ducks
today / Where, boy, where?"

As he hits the second line, he earnestly changes his voice register to imitate the response of a female. This drives James and the others into hysterics, imitating him.

TIZARD (CONT'D)

(continuing regardless)

"All in that yonder pond / There,
boy, there! Betty and her Ducks!
Oliver and her Deer / Deer and
Oliver / Roland and Oliver / The
King, and the King his deer / Now
and forever more..."

There is a moment. Tizard seems exhausted. James perseveres.

JAMES

Go on.

Tizard carries on. It is a memory game of a song, like "My Aunty went to Market". This has been set as a test and trap.

TIZARD

(concentrating)

Oh! Thomas, Thomas, have you seen
my horse to-day? / Where, boy, where?

The boys fall about laughing again.

TIZARD (CONT'D)

"All on that yonder plain / There,
boy, there!

He gulps and takes a breath, struggles to remember, before half-mumbling, half-singing through the first few lines.

TIZARD (CONT'D)

"Thomas and his horse, horse and
thomas -

JAMES

(shouting)

Louder!

TIZARD

(flinching, screaming)

"Betty and her Ducks! Oliver and her Deer / Deer and Oliver - Oliver and her Deer, Deer and Oliver, Oliver and her Deer - I don't know it, I don't -

JAMES

(aggressively)

Go on!

TIZARD

(visibly distressed)

I dussen want it. Please, Jim. Please.

He peters out, whimpering, a pathetic sight. The landlord looks on in a mixture of impotency and shame. James comes over to Tizard, beckons him to sit.

JAMES

Come down, lad.

Tizard lowers himself down onto the table so that he and James are face to face. James reaches and pulls Tizard's slumped face up with his hand, almost tenderly.

JAMES (CONT'D)

'Ee knows lad: there's a price to be paid. For each sin under 'eaven, a punishment from God's hand.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Susannah sits on the bed in her NIGHTGOWN, turned away from the sleeping Bethia. Her wet eyes glisten in the darkness as she stares straight ahead, almost looking for an answer to something.

A moment or two, she seems to find it. Without a word, she stands up and creeps out of the door.

INT. RED LION INN, LULWORTH - NIGHT

James et al barrack and bark at Tizard as he spins repeatedly around A CANE standing on the floor, on which his forehead rests. It is a classic child's game to become dizzy.

With the SHOUTING AT FEVER PITCH, he stumbles to the bar in the direction of the pulled ale.

He reaches it but almost immediately falls down to the side, pulling the tankard upon himself.

James and the men fall about laughing, while Tizard looks wretched and nauseous on his back.

Suddenly, there is a SLAM OF THE FRONT DOOR and all eyes turn to the stooped entrance to the inn, as Elijah ambles through and stands to his full, imposing height.

There is a sense of boys being caught smoking by their father. James is more defiant than the others.

JAMES

Late out, Elijah. I never knew 'ee drank, other than communion.

LANDLORD

(attempted humour)

Not for many moons, right 'Lijah?

Elijah remains undistracted, holding his gaze on James.

ELIJAH

I would talk with 'ee.

JAMES

What about?

ELIJAH

I think 'ee know.

James shrinks slightly under Elijah's stare. An awkward moment before Elijah goes over to the fallen Tizard, helping him to his feet.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

"Be not among winebibbers," Samuel Tizard.

Tizard holds onto Elijah like a rescued stray, shivering, staring into the old man's eyes in fear, but glancing vengefully at his tormentors in the saloon.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Go on now. Go sleep on the beach. Thy'll wake Old Mary t'otherwise.

Tizard takes a second before nodding assent. He stumbles to the door, before throwing it open and falling into the night.

Elijah watches him go, before turning back to James and the others, who do not move. He looks at them in turn for a moment, signalling his quiet reproach of them all...

Then retreats to a TABLE AND CHAIRS near the entrance. They watch as he sits down and leans back, staring at James from the dark corner, expectantly.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - NIGHT

Looking down on the hamlet that borders the perfect horseshoe cove. The warm flecks of candlelit windows glow in the darkness.

CUT TO:

Tizard CRASHES, drunk, on the steeply shelving pebble beach. Suffering and barely conscious, he crawls and lies down next to the thin shelter of A SMALL SKIFF pulled ashore.

On his back, his eyes stare up into the heavens and the MOON AND STARS shine back upon Tizard benevolently, causing his eyes to softly close.

Looking down from the cliffs, we see a SMALL WHITE FIGURE dressed in a nightgown arrive at the shoreline...

-- Susannah stands on the pebble beach staring out into THE MOONLIT BAY. The SURF gently pulses and hisses in retreat.

CU: The wind blows square in SUSANNAH'S TREMBLING FACE as she stares out to the dark black ocean beyond. After a moment, she wipes tears from her eyes, makes a decision, steels herself then -

She takes off her SHOES, places them in a neat pair beside her on the beach.

CU: Low angle on the shoes, behind which we can see THE DISTANT SUPINE BODY OF TIZARD, asleep next to the skiff.

Susannah pulls her gown over her head, folds it neatly in front of her before bending down to place it under the shoes to keep it from blowing away.

She stands up and turns to face the ocean again, closes her eyes against the wind.

CUT TO:

LS: We see this vulnerable young woman like a small white peg in the vastness of the black and moonlit bay.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - EARLY MORNING

CU: Bethia's HAND passes over the empty side of the bed, illuminated by the STRONG LOW SHAFT OF THE SUN'S FIRST LIGHT through the tiny cottage window.

Bethia slowly comes to and realises that her hand is tracing the absence of Susannah.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia creeps along the floorboards on the landing trying to avoid the creaks. She passes the ajar door to her parent's room.

POV: Bethia peeks through into the small bedroom and sees Elijah and Jane still asleep, turned away from each other. Bethia stares into HER FATHER'S FACE turned in her direction.

Bethia edges slowly away from the door and pads softly down the stairs.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

In a cloak, Bethia emerges from THE FRONT YARD of the cottage into the lane. She stops to look and listen. The village is still asleep.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - MORNING

As we follow behind, Bethia approaches the beach from the lane. The SEAS ARE QUIET AND LAPPING, the sun low and golden.

CU: Susannah's SHOES still placed neatly on her gown on the beach.

Bethia stands over the clothes absent their owner, recognising them as her sister's. She looks out to sea, half expecting to see her swimming in the cove, but finds nothing.

Her head turns to see the prone Tizard still lying on the beach.

CUT TO:

-- Tizard GASPS as WATER is thrown in his face. HANDS grab him and pull him to his feet in front of A SMALL CROWD OF MEN, including Bill and Rob, now gathered on the beach. An apoplectic James PUNCHES him in the FACE.

CU: Bethia WINCES as she stands by her mother at the top of the beach. Jane looks on impassively.

Tizard reels and falls again, but is immediately grabbed by the men and pulled to his feet, stunned and bleeding.

JAMES
(shouting)
Where is she?

Tizard screams and wrestles against the grasp of the men like a captured animal. James hoves in again to throttle him.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(gritted, exertion)
Where'd you put her, you gawk-
hammer?

Tizard flails under James' grasp. The three men holding onto him begin to look nervous - they are complicit in a murder.

Bethia rushes forward but is held back by Jane.

BETHIA
(crying)
Stop it! You're killing him!

Janes pulls her back. Bethia looks up at her mother but Jane keeps staring straight ahead.

James is pulled off Tizard by the men. Tizard gasps and falls onto his back, choking and coughing.

One of the men nudges another - gestures to the top of the beach. They all turn to see Elijah rock still with his crook.

Bethia and Jane turn to face him as he starts straight past them towards the crowd of men, all of whom are silent and respectful as he approaches.

As he arrives in front of Tizard and stares down at the wretched man, he notices Bill in the crowd holding SUSANNAH'S NIGHTGOWN in one hand and HER SHOES in the other.

Elijah plods over to Bill who shrinks when he realises what he is holding. Elijah stares into his face with the eyes of Christ unto Judas, then holding his hand out expectantly.

Bill shifts nervously, before raising the gown and shoes into Elijah's hands, who receives them with confusion and reverence, looks like he doesn't know what to do with them.

A moment - before he turns back to where Tizard sits on the pebbled shore. Coming close, he sits down cross-legged opposite him.

He places Susannah's gown in his lap and gently folds it into a square, then places the shoes neatly on top.

Elijah scrutinises Tizard, who cannot avoid his gaze.

ELIJAH
Did 'ee see her, Sammy?

TIZARD
I wore sleeping, 'Lijah. I swear.

Elijah pauses for a moment.

ELIJAH
Go on with you.

Tizard stares.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
Leave us!

Tizard pauses for a moment, before picking himself up and dashing off. CONSTERNATION - MEN ALL SHOUTING THEIR DISPLEASURE at once.

PISH - PASH of Pebbles as Bethia breaks free from Jane's hold and sprints into the circle in front of her father.

BETHIA
Da! I know what did 'appen to her.

Elijah and the circle turn to look at her.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. FIELD - DAY

Cloudy skies, a different time but not long ago. Bethia sprints across a field, challenging herself, free.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE FRONT - DAY

Bethia eyes peer from behind A BUSH observing -

POV: A LARGE COUNTRY MANOR house. She watches as some garden servants wander across the lawn with tools in hand and disappear.

She takes one look around before walking up to the house and up to the GRAND FRONT DOOR. Checking that she is not being watched, she gently tries THE HANDLE. The door softly CLICKS open and she pushes at it.

CUT TO:

INT. RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

The diminutive Bethia silently appears in the tall entrance to the grand and pristine reception area, delicately shutting the door behind her.

HER EYES scan the space before -

--DISTANT THUMPS from far off areas of the house --

Startled, she breaks off to her LEFT where she enters -

INT. DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Bethia stalks among the furniture until she comes upon - A SMALL REPRODUCTION SCULPTURE OF HEBE after Canova, resting on an occasional table.

Bethia approaches the figurine with uncertain recognition. Her eyes fall bashfully on the naked breasts and the semi-clad form beneath.

Fixated, she reaches her hand slowly out to touch it - her fingers are INCHES away before --

A HAND clasps over her mouth and she is suddenly hauled backwards and wheeled away by AN UNKNOWN FIGURE.

Bethia breaks free, spinning round to be face to face with Susannah, in her house maid livery, finger to her lips and furrowed angry brows.

Susannah furtively steps away to close the door that leads back to the reception hall, before dashing back to Bethia.

SUSANNAH

(whispered)

What 'ee doing here? Don't 'ee have no sense?

BETHIA

I came to see -

SUSANNAH

Came to see what, mind? The back of
my 'and? Ee 'll get me thrown out!

Bethia smiles at her: 'I'm too cute to be mad at, aren't I?'
Susannah relents and drops her anger a little -

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

Why'd 'ee not come through the
servant door?

BETHIA

(incredulous)
Ee' have your own door?

A DOOR SLAM OFF somewhere in the house. Susannah and Bethia
are spooked. Susannah grabs Bethia and ushers her away from
the reception hall door to the other side of the drawing room
where she bundles her through to -

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- Susannah and Bethia step in and Susannah turns around to
close the door quietly behind them.

Bethia steps into the library EYES ABLAZE at the tall shelves
and the LITHOGRAPHS on the walls. Susannah turns and sees
Bethia approaching the books, and rushes to restrain her.

SUSANNAH

Don't 'ee touch nuttin'!

INDISTINCT VOICES OFF distract Susannah for a moment. She
bends down to talk with Bethia.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

Stay 'ere.

Susannah kisses Bethia on the forehead and then slides out of
the library back to the drawing room, shutting the door
behind her.

Bethia laments the absence of her sister for a moment before
turning her attention to the room. She scans and sees
something in the corner.

POV: Bethia looks on the wall and sees a LARGE MAP.

Bethia moves over to the map to inspect it. It is a 16th
century antique engraved map that depicts the European and
North African continent. The Latin banner at the top of the
map reads: "ORBIS EUROPAE ET AFRICAE EXACTISSIMA".

Bethia draws in and sees the Atlantic ocean filled with engravings of different things which she scans.

INSERT: A SHIP battling against HUGE WAVES

Her EYES scan further:

INSERT: An ugly looking SEA MONSTER, tentacles branching out over the waves.

Bethia is taken aback, never having seen anything like this before. She see something else, but can't make it out.

Turning around she grabs a nearby ORNATE AND GUILDED CHAIR from next to A BUREAU and pulls it towards the map, before standing on the chair to take a closer look.

Off the south western coast in the Atlantic Ocean, there is a engraving of what is clearly -

INSERT: A MERMAID, naked from the waist up, long flowing hair, with scaled tail and elaborate fin dancing atop the waves, and holds a seashell mirror in her hand.

Bethia stares unblinking at the picture, leans back to take it in, almost mirroring the pose of the smiling creature -

MALE LOUD VOICE OFF disturbs Bethia and she almost falls off the chair.

MALE VOICE
(off, muffled)
What are you doing in here?

Bethia pauses for a second before stepping down off the chair and burrowing into the corner of the room.

POV: She looks over to the drawing room door where the sounds come. The MALE VOICE is angry and relatively clear but what sounds like Susannah's voice is quiet and indistinct.

MALE VOICE (CONT'D)
(off, muffled)
Well?

SUSANNAH'S MUFFLED VOICE OFF continues offering indistinct quiet protest until suddenly it all goes quiet. Nothing.

Bethia tiptoes towards the door which she notices is minutely ajar. She peers through the tiny gap for A LONG TIME, EYES WIDENING before...

--The door BURSTS open and Susannah enters - slamming the door behind her, catching her breath. She doesn't acknowledge Bethia for a moment, before frowning at her.

EXT. FIELD - MOMENTS LATER

Susannah marches across the field with Bethia in tow.

SUSANNAH

Come on!

BETHIA

Wait! Where we going?

SUSANNAH

I'm taking 'ee home.

BETHIA

No!

Bethia throws herself on the ground. Susannah stops and turns back to look at her.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

I'm not going!

SUSANNAH

Hurry up!

BETHIA

Ma'll 'ave me making buttons. I
'ates buttons.

Susannah sighs and smiles slightly. She changes tack and comes and sits on the ground alongside her sister.

SUSANNAH

Why do 'ee think I works up at the
house?

She pantomimes the monotony of sewing Dorset buttons in a way that makes Bethia laugh.

BETHIA

Why can't I work at the house?

SUSANNAH

Not old enough, silly. Besides, it
ain't much better, I think.

Susannah drifts off somewhere. Bethia brings her back.

BETHIA

There be naked women all over that house.

SUSANNAH

They be statues, that's all.

BETHIA

There were a naked woman in the sea and she had a tail like a fish.

SUSANNAH

What are thee blathering on about?

BETHIA

On the map. In the sea. 'Ee could see 'er boobies and she was brushing her long hair like this -

She pantomimes too. It's Susannah's turn to laugh.

SUSANNAH

That's a mermaid.

BETHIA

What's a mermaid?

SUSANNAH

It's a sea-creature that is half-woman, Half-not.

Bethia sits up.

BETHIA

Half-what?

SUSANNAH

Half-not! Half-fish!...
They sit on rocks and do charm sailors to their death.

BETHIA

With their boobies?

SUSANNAH

(laughing)
With their beauty. And their siren song. They spend their days brushing their long hair and swimming in the sea.

BETHIA

I like the sea.

SUSANNAH
'Ee can't swim!

BETHIA
I can! Ma' won't let me.

SUSANNAH
Because 'ee be small and the
currents would take 'ee away.

BETHIA
If I were a mermaid, I could swim.

SUSANNAH
With that tail sparking in the sun!

BETHIA
I couldn't be a mermaid, but 'ee
could.

SUSANNAH
Why ever so?

BETHIA
I don't have boobies. But 'ee do.

Susannah makes a faux-shocked expression - a clutching of pearls, which makes Bethia giggle.

SUSANNAH
(sighing)
I would be very happy to swim away.
Nothing more than diving in the
waves and playing with the seals.
T'would be heaven, I think.

Bethia says nothing for a time. Susannah shakes her lightly on the shoulder, before standing up over her.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
Come 'ee home now.

She walks off across the field.

POV: Bethia watches her sister go but the sun shines in her eyes so that Susannah's figure disappears into the glare.

CUT TO:

INT. OCEAN - NIGHT

Underwater. Dark. THE BACK OF SUSANNAH'S HEAD up close.
MOONLIT HAIR wafting in the currents.

END OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - DAY

Elijah stares dumbfounded at Bethia, still in the middle of the circle of men, who know not where to look. A moment -

BETHIA
It's true, Da!

Elijah runs his hand over his chin before answering.

ELIJAH
A mermaid.

Bethia nods. Elijah leans in.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
Swear to Almighty God?

Bethia hesitates for a second, before nodding. Elijah gives her a strange look before --

-- Jane GRABS HER, SCREAMING WILDLY, pulls her out of the circle and drags her by the scruff of her neck up the beach.

Bethia begins to scream in terror - Jane pulls her round and SLAPS HER ROUNDLY IN THE FACE.

JANE
(wildly)
What you be sayin? What you be
thinkin? What are you, child?

Jane sees Bethia's face stunned with terror and curdles inside, before falling backwards onto the pebbles weeping hysterically.

Bethia feels the heat and sting of her slapped face - she frowns and furrows her brow in hurt and shock.

BETHIA
(mutters, spitting)
It's true.

TWO WOMEN come alongside and lift Jane to her feet, still crying and lead her off the beach, WAILING.

Elijah comes alongside Bethia and puts an arm around her. Bethia burrows into him but also looks down the beach at James, who stares right back at her before turning away -

ELIJAH

(to the men)

Let the constable be called. When the tide goes out, we'll walk the beaches.

CUT TO:

MONTAGE: Men of the village scour the surrounding area over the course of the day:

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - DAY

Men clamber over the rocks that frame the cove to reach adjoining beaches.

EXT. CLIFFS BETWEEN LULWORTH AND DURDLE DOOR - DAY

Men walk the cliffs that separate the coves.

EXT. FIELD - AFTERNOON

Men trudge through WOODLAND bordering the fields.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - LATE AFTERNOON

MEN gather outside the FRONT DOOR of the manor house with lanterns and knock on the door. A footman answers and listens to the news.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - TWILIGHT

LS: From on high, we see the VARIOUS LANTERN CARRYING PARTIES CONVERGE ON THE VILLAGE.

END OF MONTAGE.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The CANDLE is still on. Bethia can hear the DISTANT SOBBING of Jane from the bedroom across the hall.

Bethia feels her hand down the empty side of her bed.

Elijah enters into the bedroom and sits down on the bed. He carries a SMALL DOG-EARED BIBLE in his hand.

ELIJAH
I thought we might say a prayer.

BETHIA
Did Mam say a prayer?

ELIJAH
No.

BETHIA
What will a prayer do?

ELIJAH
Help God forgive us. And forgive
your sister.

Bethia doesn't say anything, he assumes tacit permission. He opens the bible in his hand, A RIBBONED BOOKMARK ensures that it falls open at a certain spot.

Bethia looks at the bible:

CU: THE PAGES ARE LOOSE AND COMING AWAY IN PLACES.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
"Have mercy upon me, O God,
according to thy loving kindness:
according unto the multitude of thy
tender mercies blot out my
transgressions. Wash me thoroughly
from mine iniquity, and cleanse me
from my sin. For I acknowledge my
transgressions, and my sin is ever
before me. Against thee, thee only,
have I sinned, that thou mightest
be justified when thou speakest,
and be clear when thou judgest."

There is a pause.

BETHIA
How come you read?

ELIJAH
The old parson taught me. Afore you
wore born. Gave me this, what's
left of it.

BETHIA
Why?

ELIJAH

He did take pity on me. I was a sinner. He knew I needed the grace of God.

BETHIA

Am I a sinner?

ELIJAH

We all be sinners.

BETHIA

Does I have to go to Hell?

ELIJAH

(breath before)

Not if the Grace of God be upon 'ee.

Bethia seems dissatisfied and turns over away from Elijah.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Did Susannah tell you anything fore she left?

BETHIA

I were asleep.

ELIJAH

How do 'ee know she be a mermaid then?

BETHIA

I just does.

ELIJAH

Does that make sense?

Bethia turns back to Elijah with fierce eyes.

BETHIA

If I go to Hell, does I go for ever?

ELIJAH

For all eternity.

BETHIA

Dussen make no sense neither. Ma clobbers me when I done wrong, but she don't stay mad forever.

Elijah shrugs his shoulders. He has no immediate answer.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
 You do think Susannah in Hell?

ELIJAH
 (turns away)
 I pray it not be so.

BETHIA
 (forcefully)
 She be a mermaid.

She turns over again. Elijah slowly gets up, walks to the head of the bed and gives her a kiss on the head, blows the candle out and softly exits the room. Bethia's eyes burn like coals in the darkness.

EXT. UNDERWATER, OCEAN - NIGHT

BEGINNING OF DREAM

CU: THE BACK OF SUSANNAH'S HEAD, her hair flailing in the under current.

Bethia swims under the water in her night gown trying to reach Susannah but pulled back by a current. As she opens her mouth to call for her sister, bubbles multiply in HISS AND NOISE until -

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Bethia wakes up alone, with the day streaming in once more.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia fully dressed, descends the stairs to find Jane already silently at work, sewing more Dorset buttons.

Jane doesn't look up from her work. Bethia can see that she has TEARS IN HER EYES, but she carries on regardless.

Bethia goes to the door and touches the handle before looking round to see if her mother will stop her. Jane does not look up from her work, so Bethia proceeds to open the front door and slips out, shutting the door behind her.

Jane stops for a moment, looks up to THE WINDOW where she spots the BLUR OF BETHIA disappearing into the lane. She sighs, suppresses something before returning to her work.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - DAY

Bethia arrives at the BEACH to discover a hive of activity. A CROWD OF MEN are in the process of launching THREE FISHING BOATS OR LUGGERS into the cove.

With two luggers already in the water, the men are busy pulling the third vessel into the water with ropes. Bethia sees James in this group, sweating and angry.

She turns and sees Elijah down at the water's edge close to one of the already launched boats, and immediately begins to run and weave through the men to get to him.

When she arrives he is about to be helped onto the prow by the occupants -

BETHIA

Da! Where you going?

Elijah stops briefly to rest a hand on her head, before jumping aboard as he speaks.

ELIJAH

Just peep out of the cove. Take a look-see.

BETHIA

She'll be underwater. Ee'll not find her.

The men around her push Elijah's boat out while he keeps talking to her.

ELIJAH

(eyes fixed on her)

Then I'll be home soon, won't I?

She watches him go. Around the two of them is chaos and urgency. James boards the third boat in the water. He looks across at Elijah and Bethia before he tends to the oars.

EXT. CLIFFS BETWEEN LULWORTH AND DURDLÉ DOOR - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia runs up THE STEEP HILL that overlooks the cove. Breathless, she looks down on the bay and sees the boats sailing out into the blue waters.

She runs further up until she reaches THE PLATEAU PATH that runs along the cliff. Still heaving, she approaches the edge to take in THE FULL SEA VISTA.

She shuts HER EYES briefly as the wind blows in her face, before opening again.

POV: As she stares out onto the horizon, she sees a DISTANT FLASH in the water.

She leans in, squints her eyes with a hand over her brow to bring shade for the glare, looking closer -

POV: A DISTANT FLASH OF SOMETHING THAT LOOKS LIKE A FIN.

Bethia gasps, her eyes wet with the wind -

BETHIA
(whispered)
Nannah!

-- MALE SOBBING - from behind her.

She spins around but sees nothing. The sobbing continues and she locates it coming from THE LONG GRASS on the other side of the cliff path.

Bethia edges in the direction of the sobbing. Suddenly, Tizard pops up from BEHIND A TUSSOCK: bruised, frightened, scared. Bethia jumps back too.

There is an awkward standoff. Bethia sees that Tizard is more nervous, trembling, twitchy. Relieved, she approaches.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
Is your face hurtin' still?

Tizard considers the question for a moment before shamefully nodding.

TIZARD
They does give me a good hidin'
this time.

Bethia nods - she was there.

TIZARD (CONT'D)
They call the constable. So I - I
run away.

Tizard pauses before awkwardly stepping forward to plead -

TIZARD (CONT'D)
I never did harm your sister.

BETHIA
(of course)
I know. I saw her.

Tizard looks hard and then down at his feet, face wrenched with confusion. Bethia runs back to the cliff edge and points out to sea.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

Out there!

Tizard stumbles over, following the line of Bethia's finger till he stands with her next to the cliff edge. He stares hard out to sea but seeing nothing, turns to her.

TIZARD

Where?

BETHIA

(teacher)

She gone now. Under the water.

Tizard's eyes widen and he starts to panic, makes off down the hill.

TIZARD

We must tell the boats.

(shouting after them)

Hey! Hey!

Bethia chases after him.

BETHIA

Sammy! Sammy!

She grabs his hand and pulls him back, he tries to wrestle free.

TIZARD

There ain't no time. She be drowning!

BETHIA

(shouting)

She be a mermaid!

He stops dead, staring after her. After a moment, he sits himself on the ground, holds his head in his hand for a moment. Bethia lowers herself onto the grass beside him.

TIZARD

My 'ead don't half hurt.

A moment. He lifts his head up.

TIZARD (CONT'D)
 They filled me so full last night,
 I 'ad no sense of what was done
 when I woke. But now...

He turns sheepishly to her.

TIZARD (CONT'D)
 I dussen know whether things were
 dreams nor - nor living things. But
 I ... I think I did see: Somethin'

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - NIGHT

Just as before, we see Tizard come to the beach drunk and fall asleep under the cover of the skiff.

C.U. TIZARD'S EYES - begin to flicker and half open.

POV: Profile of Susannah in her nightgown, blown by the breeze. The veil of Tizard's drunken gaze gives her A SHIMMERING UNREALITY.

CU: Tizard's eyes open fully.

POV: Susannah takes off her gown as before, laying it under her shoes and standing up against the wind. Tizard watches, murmuring gently but incoherently, as Susannah steps from the beach into the water.

She wades out far as she can stand up, before finally duck-diving beneath the waves. In the distance a FIN flicks above the water before sliding beneath.

CU: Tizard eyes flicker and shut once more.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. CLIFFS BETWEEN LULWORTH AND DURDLE DOOR - DAY

Bethia sits in the wake of what she's just been told.

BETHIA
 (to herself)
 I said it was true.

TIZARD
 I dussen mean to look. I never saw
 nothing else.

Bethia doesn't know how to answer that.

TIZARD (CONT'D)
Do 'ee think they'll 'ang me?

BETHIA
I won't let 'em.

She smiles at him. He dries his eyes on his sleeve.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - LATE AFTERNOON

The LOW GOLDEN BEAMS OF THE AFTERNOON SUN fringe the cove as the last of three boats return to the beach. James hangs forlornly on the rigging as the hull GRINDS to a halt.

The TWO OTHER CREW jump into the water and start to pull on the mooring ropes.

Bethia runs onto the beach excitedly to find Elijah. James jumps off the prow onto the beach as she arrives breathless at his feet.

BETHIA
James! I saw her! I saw Susannah!

JAMES
What ye saying now?

BETHIA
Where's Da?

JAMES
Gone home to yer mother, where 'ee should be a-biden.

BETHIA
I saw Susannah. Out in the water.

JAMES
What?

BETHIA
I saw her tail stand up. Tizard swears he saw it too -

Bethia doesn't get much further before James grabs her violently.

JAMES
(shouting)
Listen now!
(MORE)

JAMES (CONT'D)

Tizard's a monster - he probably
done away with her, did 'ee think
on that?

BETHIA

Stop it!

JAMES

What did 'ee think we be doing all
day, Bethia? Eh! Eh!

BETHIA

(crying)
Ye hurting me!

JAMES

Get away with your lies!

No sooner as he finished than he releases her, suddenly aware
that he is hurting a child. Overwhelmed, he brings a
trembling hand up to his forehead and doubles over.

He turns and falls to sit on the pebbles, back turned away
from Bethia, who pedals away from him, wide-eyed and
breathing heavy.

CU: James' FACE, wretched, tired, unshaven, bloodshot.

SOUND OF DISTANT DRUMMING SLOWLY CRESCENDOS -

MATCH DISSOLVE TO:

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. LONDON STREET - DAY

CU: Jame's FACE: youthful, smiling, head wearing the black
cap of an infantry soldier, head tilted upwards with pride.

DRUMS and PIPES, CHEERS and CHURCH BELLS all around. Pull
back to see that James is part of A SIZEABLE PHALANX OF RED-
COATED SOLDIERS marching down the street through a crowd of
enthusiastic well-wishers.

HANDKERCHIEFS are waved high in the air as they salute the
men returning from the Napoleonic wars. James sees a small
GROUP OF YOUNG WOMEN giggling on the side of the road as he
approaches, pointing him out.

After some goading from her friends, one WOMAN rushes out between the lines to plant a kiss on James cheeks before running back to her friends. He half turns but the march pushes him forward and the women are soon behind him.

EXT. LULWORTH CHURCH AND VILLAGE GREEN - DAY

The BELLS of the church sound out - a celebration!

INT. BETHIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Bethia and Jane sit silently in the dimmed common room, making Dorset Buttons. The light from the window flickers from the SHADOWS OF PEOPLE bustling through the lane outside. There is EXCITED HUBBUB, punctuated by GIRLISH GIGGLES.

SUSANNAH bursts through the door in her maid's livery, breathless. She stands there with a wild grin.

SUSANNAH

They're back!

A moment of non-comprehension.

JANE

Why aren't 'ee up at the 'ouse?

SUSANNAH

The Master did dismiss us all. The whole village is out.

(to Bethia)

Come see!

Bethia looks excitedly at her mother, who puts down her sewing with a sigh.

Bethia leaps up, grabs her elder sister's hand and they disappear in a flash, followed by Jane.

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia and Susannah sprint onto the green from their lane to find A SMALL GATHERING OF PEOPLE looking down the main street expectantly. They arrive to see the arrival of a HORSE-DRAWN CART with a DOZEN OR SO SOLDIERS sitting on the back.

The cart stops with a cheer by the village green as the gathered crowd swarm the cart as SEVEN SOLDIERS descend from the cart including the young JAMES, who is patted on the back by some of the men.

Susannah watches from the other side as James is greeted by his MOTHER and FATHER and embraces them fully and in joyful tears. Bethia notices Susannah's long study of this scene.

SUSANNAH
 (noticing Bethia)
 Ee'd be too young to remember
 James, Tom Baldwin's son.

Bethia shakes her head. In the distance, someone has given all the soldiers and James tankards of ale. A party has already begun.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
 Lived out on Coombe Lane. But a
 babe when he took up arms. Now look
 at him.

Bethia watches as Susannah moves forward to cross the village green towards the fray. After some distance, Susannah is close enough to be noticed by James. He turns and looks at her and excuses himself from the fray.

CU: Bethia's EYES stare across the green as she watches -

- He and Susannah stand opposite each other. Their words cannot be heard but the attraction between them is obvious.

CUT TO:

LATE AFTERNOON - the celebration is in full swing, with musicians, dancing, singing and happy drinking.

Bethia sits pulling out tufts of grass alone, staring mournfully at James and Susannah across the way, now seated on the ground opposite each other, talking happily.

Jane emerges from the lane and also watches the two lovers, HALOED BY THE DESCENDING SUN.

MATCH CUT TO:

END OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - TWILIGHT

James sits at the water's edge alone looking out to sea.

Pull back to Bethia's, sitting on one of the hills overlooking the beach, she stares suspiciously at James -

ELIJAH
 Bethia.

She gasps and whips round to discover her father behind her at a safe distance, lantern in hand.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - NIGHT

Bethia and Elijah walk through the night on their way home.

BETHIA
Why do he sit there like that?

ELIJAH
He be pining. For your sister.

BETHIA
But she's not gone.

ELIJAH
So thee say.

BETHIA
I saw her. And so did Sam Tizard.

ELIJAH
Aye.

A moment.

BETHIA
Do you love Ma like James loves
Susannah?

Elijah stops, breathes for a moment before answering.

ELIJAH
I loves God. Then I loves your Ma.
And you.

BETHIA
And Susannah?

ELIJAH
Aye.

BETHIA
Would you sit on the beach and cry
if I ... became a mermaid?

Elijah stoops down to reach her level.

ELIJAH
I would do that. I would sit and
weep for 'ee, my lamb.

BETHIA
 (weeping)
 I dussen think Ma would cry for me.

ELIJAH
 (hand on her)
 Sssh, child! Your Ma is ... endless
 forgiving and grace. She has
 forgiven me my many sins.

BETHIA
 I dussen feel it.

ELIJAH
 (intense)
 Have faith in it. 'Ee will know
 grace as I have: it will surely
 come. God in his mercy gave us
 another child.

Bethia calms down and nods her weak affirmation. Elijah
 stands up, takes her hand and leads her into the darkness.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

C.U. Bethia's face awake in the night.

After a moment she turns over and finds SUSANNAH is awake and
 staring back at her, and it has become -

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

The conversation is whispered.

BETHIA
 Does 'ee fancy that James?

SUSANNAH
 He's nice though ain't he?
 Handsome.

Bethia shrugs her shoulders.

BETHIA
 What does it feel like?

SUSANNAH
 I feels like something's a-
 fluttering. Down there. And when I
 get closer to him, it's like my
 skin has little fires all over it.

BETHIA

It burns?

SUSANNAH

I don't have the words.

BETHIA

You need to go into the sea to put
the fire out.

SUSANNAH

What if I like the burning?

BETHIA

I don't understand.

SUSANNAH

You will.

BETHIA

Never.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MORNING

Jane is already set up for her day's work on the BUTTONS.
Susannah is in her maid's livery, gathering her things to
leave for the morning.

SUSANNAH

I'll be going then.

JANE

(warning)

Be sure to come home straight.

SUSANNAH

(pointed)

Why, what else would I do, Ma?

Jane doesn't reply, but carries on with her work. Susannah
gestures disappointment and looks to Bethia who descends the
stairs.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

(to them both)

I'm called to help with dinner
tonight.

She leaves through the front door. Bethia pauses before
running out after her.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia rushes out to the lane and catches up with Susannah, tugging at her sleeve.

SUSANNAH

What is it?

Bethia pulls her hand closer and palms something into it.

BETHIA

I made 'ee a button.

Susannah stoops down see her reveal a DORSET SHELL WEAVE BUTTON sitting in her palm. Unlike the traditional cartwheel design, this one as been neatly woven in five spokes that flower outward to form a shell in the middle of the ring.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

It's not like the others. I made it like a shell that the mermaid had in the map.

Susannah clasps it in her hand and reaches out to kiss Bethia on the forehead.

SUSANNAH

I can brush my hair and look into the mirror.

Susannah stands up and puts the button in the apron of her maid dress.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

Go on to mother.

Susannah turns and walks up THE LANE, busy with PEOPLE. Bethia watches as she reaches the top of the lane, where James emerges from a side alley. After greeting each other with a smile, James continues escorting her.

Bethia stands for a moment, turns briefly back towards the house, before stopping.

EXT. APPROACH TO THE MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Before the beginning of the front drive, Susannah and James talk, their words unheard. At a point of separation, Susannah offers her hand to James who takes it tenderly.

She turns to go but James hangs on to her hand causing her to halt.

She smiles, looks nervously over her shoulder before coming in to seal a kiss on James' lips. She grips his hand in hers before releasing and running off toward the house.

He watches her go, before turning back down the path and walking out of sight -

- Bethia is revealed, HID BEHIND A TREE that lines the road up to the House. She pulls herself into the open as James disappears, carefully checking that he doesn't look back.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE FRONT - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia creeps across the drive towards the big front door --

-- which opens as she gets within metres of it, forcing her to sprint for cover as A GENTLEMAN CALLER emerges from the house and marches off as Bethia disappears to -

EXT. MANOR HOUSE BACK GARDEN - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia stalks round the shaded rear of the building and finds the SERVANT'S ENTRANCE -

INT. TRADE RECEPTION ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia sneaks through the downstairs, working area of the house, DISTANT CLANKING FROM THE NEARBY KITCHEN, as she tiptoes past to where she spots some STAIRS GOING UPWARDS -

INT. DRAWING ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia runs in from the reception hall and flattens herself against the wall for cover.

Recovering her breath, she looks into the drawing room, seeing again THE SCULPTURE OF HEBE, brazen again, seemingly staring at her. Her gaze diverts to -

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

She pads in through the tall shelves, searching again for what she saw before - THE MAP hangs where it was before.

She moves the chair again to the space under the map and stands on it again, till she finds the MERMAID again. She stares at it hard almost willing it to come to life.

Despite herself, her finger reach forward towards the map. As the fingers INCH CLOSER to the surface --

-- THE DOOR OPENS - THE LORD OF THE MANOR bursts in, tall, mature, clutching a leather portfolio under his arm.

He stops, gobsmacked, the sight of Bethia --

-- who immediately crashes off the chair and barges past him through the open door.

INT. DRAWING ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

-- Bethia pelts out of the drawing room, terrified, glancing behind her and therefore running straight into --

-- the SCULPTURE OF HEBE which wobbles precariously before falling and SMASHING ON THE FLOOR.

She jolts to a stop -- sees the Lord of the Manor filling the open door frame to the library -- wide-eyed and cornered and turns on her heel --

-- straight into a FOOTMAN who grabs her and lifts her from the floor. Bethia SCREAMS blue murder, thrashing like a wild cat until one of her free feet connect with the groin of her captor, and he drops her to the ground.

Bethia rushes to the free corner of the room, flicking around for potential escape, ducking and sliding under the other furniture to evade the flailing hands of the recovering footman until --

SUSANNAH
(shouting)
Bethia!

The young girl freezes -- as does everyone else.

CUT TO:

MOMENTS LATER:

Bethia sits on one of the ornate chairs watching as ANOTHER MAID sweeps the last of HEBE FRAGMENTS into a dustpan. The maid gives Bethia a slightly dirty look as rises from her job, curtseys before retreating from the room -

Bethia has the FOOTMAN behind her, while The Lord of the Manor stands opposite near to the hall. Susannah stands between them. No-one speaks.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 (to Footman)
 Leave us.

FOOTMAN
 Sir?

LORD OF THE MANOR
 She'll not run.
 (to Bethia)
 Will you?

Bethia says nothing. After consideration, the footman obliges. Susannah and Bethia are alone with his Lordship. Bethia looks to Susannah who appears more terrified than her.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
 I'll not dismiss you, Susannah.

SUSANNAH
 Your lordship.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 But the damage should be recompensed in some manner.

SUSANNAH
 (not understanding)
 Aye, your lordship.

There is a moment where this idea floats between them in the room. He turns his attentions on Bethia.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 Mermaids.

Bethia is being questioned but she is too terrified to speak.

SUSANNAH
 She did take a fancy to them in the library, sir.

A pause. Bethia looks to them both before pronouncing.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 Here is my proposal.

EXT. APPROACH TO THE MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Susannah frogmarches Bethia down the lane.

BETHIA

I can't work at the House. I make buttons with Ma'.

SUSANNAH

(incensed)

Ee' said ye hate buttons!

Susannah clocks Bethia around the ear. Bethia wriggles free.

BETHIA

Ow! I won't go.

SUSANNAH

It be two afternoons a week.

BETHIA

No!

SUSANNAH

Or my job, child!

BETHIA

(smiling, countering)

Ma won't 'ave it. She won't let me.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - DAY

-- The CHAOS and SCREAMING of Bethia trying desperately to evade Jane, who is whipping Bethia on the behind with a stick. Susannah tries her best to interpose between them.

JANE

(rage)

Come 'ere!

BETHIA

No! Ma'!

Jane finally grips Bethia firmly and bends her over the table while INCESSANTLY WHIPPING her on the legs. Bethia screams blue murder.

SUSANNAH

Ma! Stop it! Ma!

Susannah successfully grabs Jane's stick and short-circuits the violence, sending Jane marching the perimeters of the small room, walking off her rage. Bethia cries incessantly.

JANE

Thy clod of a girl! I'll brain 'ee one of these days, I swear.

BETHIA
 (through wails)
 I sorry!

JANE
 (still raging)
 And what good be that to me! I'll
 be toiling till the trays be full
 not 'ee. While you be in bondage to
 our lord and master through your
 wickedness! How could 'ee throw
 yourself under the power of a man
 like that, Ord save us!

There is a moment of recovery. Bethia sobs and stares at
 Susannah who stands helpless on the other side of the room.

SUSANNAH
 I be needed back up there.

Almost in apology to a hurt Bethia, slips out of the front
 door and is gone. A moment passes before Jane brushes herself
 down and then sits down to make buttons.

A moment later, Bethia sits down beside her.

CUT TO:

LATER THAT NIGHT:

Elijah is home: he, Bethia and Jane sit silently eating
 supper. Elijah stops eating for a moment to look up,
 seemingly awaiting something.

JANE
 She be called to dinner. I told
 you.

Elijah frowns for a moment, before reluctantly continuing to
 eat. They eat for a moment before Bethia feels compelled to
 speak.

BETHIA
 Susannah fancies that James
 Baldwin.

Elijah stops eating again, looks sternly to Jane.

ELIJAH
 (still to Jane)
 Thomas Baldwin's son?

BETHIA
He makes things flutter inside her.

Elijah turns to Bethia.

ELIJAH
Be that so?

BETHIA
I saw them kissing up by the House.

ELIJAH
(turning back to Jane)
When was I know this?

JANE
(to Bethia)
Now you're done -

BETHIA
- I'm not -

JANE
(threat)
Get 'ee to bed. Now.

A pause. Elijah stands up and moves to the corner of the room, rubbing his hands through his hair, before turning back to the table.

ELIJAH
Heed your ma now.

Bethia demonstratively descends from her chair, and moves to the fire where she takes a candle from above the mantle and a taper from a box. She lights the candle and ascends up the stairs.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia treads along the landing distracted by the sound of INTENSE WHISPERED VOICES coming up from the common room.

Before she reaches the end of the landing, she hears the voices briefly crescendo before the FRONT DOOR SLAMS -

- Some resulting change in air pressure leads the candle in her hand to FLICKER AND DIE leaving her in darkness.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Elijah strides into the lane with his lantern in hand.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia pauses in the darkness, before turning to retrieve another candle from downstairs.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia comes only so far before she sees -

POV: The sight of JANE SOBBING in her chair, her face unseen.

Bethia thinks better of reaching for the candle and turns back.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia shuts the door to the landing, still able to detect DISTANT SOBS from underneath her.

Suddenly, she hears FOOTSTEPS AND TWIGS SNAPPING outside her window. She ducks down and moves to the small window.

POV: She looks down the narrow side of the cottage a half-storey beneath her which is canopied by a small crack willow and other tall shrubs.

Bethia sees Susannah and James stalk into the alley, BROKEN MOONLIGHT SHADOWS STRIPING THEIR FACES, looking back at the lane as they seemingly escape from the departure of Elijah from the front.

After a moment, there is a sense of danger being past and James goes to clasp Susannah to him, grinning. She playfully cautions him with her finger to his lips.

C.U. BETHIA'S EYES stare through the panes of the window during -

Susannah draws James in for A SOFT AND LINGERING KISS, which deepens. His arms draw around her waist and hers slide over his shoulders. She falls back slightly against the support of the tree as their kiss strengthens.

C.U. BETHIA'S EYES widen.

Susannah tilts her head back as James starts to kiss her neck. Bethia watches as JAMES' HAND travels slowly up from the waist towards SUSANNAH'S CLOTHED BREAST and - lands -

Bethia gasps and ducks down out of sight underneath the window, clasping her hand over her mouth as she tries to stifle her panicked panting.

INTERCUT BETWEEN:

EXT. SIDE RETURN OF COTTAGE - NIGHT

James's hand still on her breast, Susannah let's out a voiceless sigh and opens her eyes to look at James for a moment before devouring him in a kiss.

BACK to Bethia, who crawls into bed and pulls the covers up to her chest, tightly closes her eyes. She can hear the GASPING, KISSING from below.

BACK to Susannah - Breaks free from the kiss to open her mouth in silent ecstasy. JAMES hand descends from her breast to meet her KNEE which is already rising.

BACK to Bethia, scrunching her eyes and holding her hands over her ears to block out the sound, which still penetrates, CRESCENDOES -

THE FLURRY OF HER PILLOW as she brings it over her head -

END OF FLASHBACK:

CUT TO:

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bethia bolts up in her bed, panting. The SOUND OF LIGHT DRIZZLE ON THE WINDOW AND ROOF. It is dark without moonlight.

Trembling, Bethia clambers out of bed and makes straight for the window where she peers down into the alley by the side of the cottage -

POV: No-one there. The shrubbery and willow moving in the wind and rain.

She turns away from the window, still trembling.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia stares at the door of her parents at the other end of the landing as she creeps silently across the landing.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia lights a lantern with a spill from the hearth embers. It lights up her wretched, tired face from beneath.

CUT TO:

She hovers by the front door, turning around to see if she has been discovered, before softly opening the door and slipping into the wet night.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - NIGHT

A drenched Bethia stumbles onto the pebble beach and drops the lantern, which breaks into pieces and goes out.

Looking up, she can hear the WAVES CRASHING but not see them - the tide is further out. She picks herself up and scans the darkened bay from side to side, while striding further out.

BETHIA

(shouting, heaving)

'Nannah! 'Nannah! Come back!

She scans but finds nothing, keeps striding out onto the wet sand. After a time, she turns around and cannot even see the pebble shore behind her. The world is now a black void.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

'Nannah, Stop it, now! Come back! I
be sorry now! 'Nannah -

She falters as she spots something in the distance: A DISTANT LANTERN GLOW. The soft oil light flickers and reflects off the surface of the water. She stands mouth open - hypnotised.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

(whispered)

'Nannah!

-- A STRONG WAVE suddenly breaks in closer and rushes in over her waist, causing her to scream. She tries to wade into shore but it lifts her off her feet in the following swell .

She paddles to keep afloat before the riptide retreats pulling her back to the sands and onto her bottom --

-- CRASH! She is engulfed by an even stronger second wave.

POV: Under the water, it is BLUR OF BUBBLES AND WATER, with the ROAR OF THE WAVES in her ears.

CUT TO:

Bethia is pulled to the surface by an UNSEEN MALE. She gasps and gags, convulsing to rid her windpipe of water.

The UNSEEN MALE throws her over his shoulder and carries her up the beach while Bethia stares at the sea behind -

When they reach the pebbles, the male lets her gently down onto the beach so that she is confronted by --

-- JAMES, her rescuer, standing over her, breathless, wet.

She makes to scream but he stoops down quickly and raises a finger to his lips, and frowns at her.

There is a moment. He stands up and looks around to check if anyone else is around.

He takes off his great coat and places it around Bethia who almost drowns in it, but wraps it tightly around herself.

JAMES

'taint dry, but it'll do.

Bethia nods, but is distracted by the sight of the LANTERN LIGHT she saw previously out in the bay, closer this time.

James tracks her line of sight to see what she has spotted before turning back to her, and stooping to her level again.

JAMES (CONT'D)

I'm thinking your Da wouldn't be happy with 'ee gadding about at this hour?

Bethia stares back, and shakes her head.

JAMES (CONT'D)

If 'ee can keep my secret, I'd be happy never to speak of this.

Bethia nods slowly.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Good girl. You wait there now.

James pauses before running off down the beach into the dark bay in the direction of the lantern light and disappears.

Bethia shivers in the great coat as she watches the LANTERN LIGHT BOB CLOSER to the beach. Out of the darkness, the glow of the lantern reveals a large rowing boat.

James wrestles with the mooring ropes as the waves threaten to suck the boat out again.

Out of the vessel jump THREE DARK FIGURES who help James land the boat on the beach. Then Bethia sees JAMES and TWO BURLY MEN march up the beach with small wooden barrels.

As they get closer, a LARGER BEARDED MAN clocks Bethia on the ground and stops, eyes lighting up. He puts the small barrel down and advances on her, drawing a SMALL GLINTING DAGGER from inside his coat.

Bethia is struck dumb by fear and opens her mouth in silent terror.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Hold!

He drops his barrel and darts in to stop the man dead.

JAMES (CONT'D)

She be with me.

The man glowers at him before returning his weapon to his pocket.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Go fetch the rest. I'll keep watch.

The man considers then acquiesces, hulking off back to the water.

James looks down and sees that Bethia is in a bad way, shivering and hyperventilating. He bends down to reach into the great coat pulled around her, and pulls out a flask from the pocket.

JAMES (CONT'D)

It be cold, dunnit?

He unscrews the flask and holds it to her mouth for her to drink. She chokes and gasps at the first taste, spitting it out. James holds it up to her lips again.

JAMES (CONT'D)

It'll warm 'ee up.

She sips again, swallowing with her eyes closed and gasping after success. Her eyes widen as she feels the liquor going down. James takes a prolonged swig from the same flask before handing it back.

JAMES (CONT'D)

Hold fast. I'll take 'ee home when we're done.

He stands up and runs back down the beach to fetch more barrels.

POV: Bethia follows with her eyes, trying hard to make out the white shirt and the lantern and the boat, but things go blurry as she begins to tire.

C.U. Bethia's face whitening, eyes closing.

POV: The blur Bethia sees dissolves into -

BEGINNING OF DREAM SEQUENCE / FLASHBACK / INTERCUT:

POV: Bethia imagines herself underwater looking out into the depths. GENTLE UNDERWATER BROWN NOISE. The water is dark but the amber glow of the lantern sends soft shafts of light into the depths.

A far off creature comes closer to her out of the vanishing point. As it nears, Bethia can see that it is the MERMAID SUSANNAH, beautiful with a long and luminescent tail.

FLASHBACK

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Bethia approaches the house.

INT. RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

SAMWAYS the footman shows her into the drawing room and gestures to the other end. She sees THE DOOR TO THE LIBRARY - ajar.

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Bethia enters and discovers THE LORD OF THE MANOR sitting on a chair by the LARGE BUREAU. There is an empty chair beside him at the desk.

INTERCUT DREAM: Underwater - Susannah the Mermaid is within touching distance, her serene face staring directly at Bethia benignly, hair flowing in all directions.

BETHIA

(v.o.)

Where be Susannah?

LORD OF THE MANOR

(v.o.)

Busy downstairs. Sit.

BACK TO FLASHBACK: Bethia sits at the desk, looking at the door as potential escape. She sees A BOOK OPEN ON THE DESK. The medieval German font is tightly packed on the page.

BETHIA

I don't read.

LORD OF THE MANOR

I thought as much. That you might like to change that. Not this one though. It's in German in any case.

BETHIA

What's that?

LORD OF THE MANOR

It's the language of a foreign land far away over the sea.

BETHIA

What does it say?

LORD OF THE MANOR

It's a German philosopher called Paracelsus.

INTERCUT DREAM: Susannah the mermaid swims with her sister in the water.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

He believed that there are water creatures called Nymphs, just as there are fire creatures, creatures of the air, creatures of the earth Monsters all, but still part of God's creation.

BACK TO FLASHBACK:

BETHIA

Are nymphs mermaids?

LORD OF THE MANOR

No. Mermaids were something else. When Nymph's souls were - corrupted - then they gave birth to mermaids.

BETHIA

What does corrupted mean?

The Lord of the Manor pauses.

BACK to Underwater - Bethia turns to her sister in joy but is terrified when --

-- C.U. Susannah's face contorts and distorts in anger, mouth open, SCREAMING AND BUBBLES.

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE / FLASHBACK INTERCUT

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - NIGHT

James squats over Bethia whitened, wheezing body in the gathered great coat. The Bearded Man and ANOTHER BURLY MAN stand over, primed for escape.

JAMES

Awake! Bethia! Time to go!

Bethia is unresponsive.

BEARDED MAN

Is she well?

JAMES

Does she look so?

BEARDED MAN

Cart is packed; we must be gone.

JAMES

(aggressive)

Then be gone.

The Bearded Man frowns slightly before pulling out A SMALL PURSE and slamming it into James' outstretched palm.

BEARDED MAN

For your troubles.

JAMES

It won't be near enough.

Slightly disgusted, the two men wander off and board A HORSE-DRAWN CART loaded with BARRELS at the bottom of the lane, which TROTS off into the darkness of the lane and disappears.

James is left alone in the lantern light with Bethia, who begins to look cadaverous. He opens the purse out into his palm and sees A FEW SORRY-LOOKING COINS. Now wet through in his shirt and waistcoat, he shivers a little too.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - MOMENTS LATER

James carries the sickly Bethia over his shoulder, the lantern with his other hand, her WHEEZING all the while.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

James enters the FRONT YARD of Bethia's cottage and lays her down under the THATCHED PORCH over the front door, still unconscious and wheezing.

He turns away for a second to leave, but slowly turns back to stare at Bethia, realising she wears his coat. He stoops down to take it before pausing, head bowed.

Standing up again, he raps his hands strongly on the front door and steps back off the porch. The THUMPS of floorboards and stairs are heard, FOOTSTEPS and finally the LATCH and CREAK of the front door -

ELIJAH stands in the open doorway, looking at James. His eyes follow James' to his prone daughter at his feet. Elijah looks disbelievingly at James standing in his front yard.

MATCH CUT TO:

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - DAY

James stands in more or less the same place just off the porch. He repeatedly looks down at the floor and fingers his hat held in front of him.

Elijah stands at the door again, but unyielding in his expression. There is an awkward moment.

JAMES

I wouldn't ask but -

ELIJAH

There be no work in Wareham?

JAMES

Wareham? No. They had a whole garrison of men come back to Wareham. The fields be full there.

ELIJAH

I hold no sway with old man Bailey.

JAMES

That 'aint what I heard. They say
you be head shepherd when he die.

ELIJAH

He's a strong old crow though. The
Lord keep him in good health.

Pause.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

You should go to Wareham.

JAMES

(stepping forward, intent)
In Wareham a man dare not look
another the wrong way lest he get
his throat cut. The working man
can't hardly buy a loaf of bread,
but he'll rob the crumbs from thy
lips.

James' has shown his threat and desperation but Elijah stands
firm in his silence.

ELIJAH

Have faith the Lord will provide.

JAMES

Forgive me, Elijah. Your Susannah -

ELIJAH

-'Ee'll not dally round my Susannah
more. She be too young for 'ee.

JAMES

She be in service up at the House.

ELIJAH

Never ee' mind that. I'll not have
her soul in danger from the likes
of you.

JAMES

(resentful glower)
The likes of I, Elijah Coake? I was
on fields abroad fighting Frenchies
while you wandered about after your
lambs.

ELIJAH

And I thank 'ee for it, James
Baldwin. But I'll split thy head in
two if I see you together more.

Elijah closes the door on an abject James -

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- turns to the common room and sees Bethia standing there in the common room alone.

BETHIA
Why be Susannah's soul in danger?

ELIJAH
Fornication is a mortal sin.

BETHIA
What be fornication?

A long awkward pause. He thinks about explaining before -

EXT. UNDERWATER, OCEAN - NIGHT / INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

INTERCUT DREAM SEQUENCE / FLASHBACK

As before, the dark is broken by shafts of soft brown light.

LORD OF THE MANOR
(v.o.)
I thought we might begin with this.

INTERCUT to LIBRARY

The Lord slides a HORNBOOK over the bureau, a wooden paddle with the alphabet and the Lord's Prayer written on it. Bethia picks it up and examines it.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Do you know the Lord's Prayer?

Bethia nods. The Lord reaches out and traces the letters at the start of the prayer for her with his finger.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
This is the very same.

BACK TO DREAM SEQUENCE

Bethia swims into frame, head darting from side to side, eyes open probing the depths beneath her.

BETHIA
(v.o.)
Our father, which art in Heaven,

POV: She sees a SHIMMER OF TAIL descending into the fathoms, becoming faint.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom
come, thy will be done in earth -

Bethia swims down in chase of the tail. The brown shafts of light fade into total darkness.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

As it is heaven.

Before too long, she looks up and sees that the dim surface and its twinkling shafts are far, far above her.

She suddenly fumbles in the water, before starting back up, trashing her legs underneath her in an effort to reach the surface.

But no matter how hard she kicks, the surface seems to remain the same distance away, if not farther out. She engages the arms, pulling at the water around her but to no avail.

She speeds up her swimming in a frantic climax before bubbles escape her mouth in a MUTED SCREAM.

END OF DREAM SEQUENCE / FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bethia gasps for breath, rasping, pale - EYES SWIMMING in her sweat-drenched, white clammy face, pinned under the blankets of her bed.

When she comes to, she sees her parents in the weak candlelit glow: Elijah sat by the side of the bed and behind him, standing pressed against the wall, Jane.

Her breathing, still weak and raspy, slows slightly as she focuses on her father.

At that moment, Jane without a word leaves the room and shuts the door.

ELIJAH

I thought we'd lost 'ee.

BETHIA
 (fevered)
 I saw her. In the water.

ELIJAH
 Susannah?

She nods. He leans in slowly.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)
 Where?

BETHIA
 (tears)
 She swam away.

He reaches to her forehead and pulls her dank locks to one side.

ELIJAH
 I think it be a dream.

BETHIA
 (frustrated)
 It were not.

ELIJAH
 'Ee be right sick. A fever.

BETHIA
 (emphatic)
 I saw her. As real as this be.

ELIJAH
 (choked)
 She be in heaven, my dear.

BETHIA
 How do 'ee know?

ELIJAH
 (struggling)
 I ... just believe.

Bethia turns away, still rasping, but in a tantrum -

CU: Bethia's EYES closing gently, pupils rolling back ... but at the moment the fluttering eyes finally surrender

BEGINING OF FLASHBACK -

The perspective changes to the back of Bethia's head - the candle is out, the room is dark.

Susannah's hand taps on her shoulder. Bethia turns round to see the frowning, pale face of her sister, standing aside the bed, doubled over slightly.

SUSANNAH
(whispered)
Get up.

BETHIA
What?

SUSANNAH
Get 'ee up, I need to take off the
linen.

Pause. Bethia jolts up and looks at the other side of the bed, pulling back the blanket. In the darkness, she can still make out A DAMP PATCH that streaks the upper half of the bed and flecks the pillow.

BETHIA
(panicked)
What be it?

SUSANNAH
Sssh. I threw up a little.

Bethia leaps out of bed on the opposing side and stands up.

BETHIA
What? Uggh!

Susannah darts across the bed awkwardly in order to place a hand on Bethia's mouth, which visibly shocks the young girl.

After a pause, Susannah realises her mistake and takes her hand away but the tone is still one of threat.

SUSANNAH
I'll take everything up to the
house and wash it. It'll be back on
tomorrow.

Bethia relaxes a little, nodding assent.

BETHIA
(smiling)
Your breath don't half stink.

Susannah rolls her eyes a little and accepts the teasing.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
Are 'ee gonna be sick again?

Susannah shakes her head. Awkward pause.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
'Ee wouldn't have to sleep here if
you married James.

Susannah almost holds her breath.

SUSANNAH
And what makes 'ee think I want to
marry James?

BETHIA
(sheepishly)
I've seen 'ee with him. You be
kissing him. And when you bring him
round the back here. Under the
tree.

SUSANNAH
(horrified)
'Ee should be in bed.

Pause. Bethia looks down.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
And what do you see?

BETHIA
I give up looking after a while; it
be disgusting. And you moaning.
Like you be ill or summat. I don't
like it.

Susannah sighs and looks away to the door, listening out for
any noise for a second.

SUSANNAH
Have 'ee told any other of this?

Bethia shakes her head and lowers it. Susannah reaches
forward and lifts Bethia's head up by the chin.

BETHIA
I told Ma and Da 'ee fancied him.

Susannah grabs Bethia by the shoulders.

SUSANNAH
What?

BETHIA
'Taint fair. Ma beat me and you get
nothing.

SUSANNAH
Nothing other?

BETHIA
What?

Susannah shakes her.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
Ow! No!

Susannah lets go of her and slumps back on the bed. Bethia rubs her shoulders. Pause.

SUSANNAH
Da won't have me marry James. So
I'm staying here. So help me clear
this up.

CUT TO:

The linen is off and Bethia and Susannah lie back to back on the bare mattress with coats over them.

CU: Bethia's face shivers in the cold.

CU: Susannah frowns in the darkness.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
I'm sorry.

CU: Bethia's doesn't reply and closes her eyes.

END OF FLASHBACK - CUT TO:

- Bethia immediately whips round in bed -

BETHIA
I'm sorry too-

- her voice trails off as she realises that the room is empty. The MORNING sun streams through the tiny window.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

Tizard stumbles along, clutching his stomach - hungry.

-CRACK! A sound in the trees bordering the lane. Tizard freezes, listening like a hare on the heath.

A silence save for the LIGHT HISSING OF BREEZE IN THE TREES.

-CRACK! Tizard leaps a little, before skipping off down the lane again, rubber-necking backwards in fear of the foreign noise, walking straight into --

-- A FIST THUNDERING INTO THE SIDE OF THE FACE

-- Tizard's HEAD HITS THE DUSTY GROUND. His face rolls upward before -

- FLURRY OF FISTS CRUNCH into his face.

CUT TO:

EXT. MAIN STREET, LULWORTH - DAY

SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS - The SHADOW OF LEGS flicker on the dusty lane punctuated by DROPPED GLOBULES OF BLOOD hitting the ground.

BOOM UP to see the BLOODY BLIND AND UNRECOGNISABLE FACE of Tizard as he stumbles into town.

An OLD WOMAN accompanied by a SMALL CHILD stop to gawp at the sight. Tizard peers back at them through the slit of his badly-swollen eye, before -

- he collapses to the ground.

CUT TO:

A SMALL CROWD has gathered to encircle the still supine Tizard who is being nursed by the OLD WOMAN, MARY (60s). An argument is already in progress, led by BILL. JAMES stands somewhat apart from the fray, observing.

BILL

You leave him be, Mary. He does deserve a right going over.

MARY

(indignant)
Oh, hush now!

BILL

For all we know, he stashed Susannah under a rock someplace.

MARY

(turning her head)
Ssssh!

Mary tries desperately to quieten Bill as she spots Elijah, who hoves into view, moves through the crowd.

Elijah looks at the swollen face of Tizard, who peers back up at him through his swollen, puffed eyes.

ELIJAH
(to Mary)
When did it happen?

MARY
He did wander in at cock's crow.

Elijah spies James on the periphery. James in turn spots Bethia as she arrives gently at her father's side. Bethia scans the face of Tizard before walking forward to kneel by him. She bursts into tears.

BETHIA
What happened to him?

ELIJAH
(to James)
Those abroad in the night might
have seen sommat.

James freezes under Elijah's glare. James in turn spots a NEW PARTY of men walking down the street: The PARISH CONSTABLE, HIS MEN, THE LORD OF THE MANOR.

BILL
Save us, it's the constable.

The crowds parts and the STOCKY, BARREL-CHESTED CONSTABLE arrives to tower over Bethia, Tizard and Mary. He surveys Tizard's injuries as if he were a broken cart.

CONSTABLE
(after a pause)
What be the matter, Sammy? Who made
you this way?

A pause. Tizard can only signal general ignorance.

CONSTABLE (CONT'D)
Speak now, man. Who set upon 'ee?

Tizard moans something incoherent -

CONSTABLE (CONT'D)
What?

TIZARD
(through broken teeth)
I don't see nothing. They did smash
me from -

The Lord of the Manor steps forward, imperious, impatient.

LORD OF THE MANOR

- Constable. This man is in need of a physician, not an interrogation.

Awkward pause. The crowd hushes looks down deferentially, apart from Elijah who brings himself fully up, unbowed.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

Have your men bring him up to the house. I will arrange his recuperation from there.

CONSTABLE

With respect, squire, this man be famous nit. He sleep in ditches mostly.

MARY

I keep him a'times, your Lordship.

LORD OF THE MANOR

Well. Tonight he sleeps under my roof. Not least, it would seem, for his own protection.

He sneaks a look at James, who remains conspicuous on the fringes.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

See it done.

CONSTABLE

(moving on Tizard)

Aye sir. Come on 'ee. Let's be 'aving you.

He gestures to the rest of his men, who swarm around Tizard and pluck him from the bosom of Mary and Bethia and begin to carry him up the lane.

POV: Bethia looks up at the Lord and sees him staring back at her intently.

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Bethia moves a QUILL across letter PAPER, tracing over the letters of the alphabet on the hornbook beneath. The Lord of the Manor watches her.

CU: The TIP scratches the lower case letter 'M' --

-- Susannah bursts in but is taken aback to see the Master sitting with Bethia.

SUSANNAH
(halting)
Begging your pardon, your Lordship.

LORD OF THE MANOR
(standing)
Not at all.

SUSANNAH
It just I heard ee'd put her to
work in here, sir. Come to see she
were doing right by your Lordship.

Bethia sticks her tongue out at Susannah unseen by the Lord.

LORD OF THE MANOR
And so she is. I will leave you
alone to practice, Bethia.
(going to the door)
Come Susannah, I would speak with
you.

He exits and Susannah looks scornfully at Bethia before disappearing through the door after the Master.

Bethia hears A MUFFLED CONVERSATION from next door. There are voices and suddenly there is the sound of Suannah SOBBING --

-- Alert, Bethia slips quietly off the chair and stalks to the exit to peer through the ajar door.

POV: Framed by the gap, we do not see Susannah but the face of the Lord of the Manor is clearly visible, frowning softly. He advances forward and disappears from view.

CU: Bethia's EYES - listening - she hears SUSANNAH sniffing and clearly --

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
(v.o.)
There, there.

END OF FLASHBACK

EXT. MAIN STREET, LULWORTH - DAY

Bethia looks at the Lord of the Manor, who eventually avoids her gaze and turns to Elijah.

LORD OF THE MANOR

Elijah Coake: I understand there is still no word of your daughter.

ELIJAH

There be none, sir.

LORD OF THE MANOR

It pains me to hear it. We shall pray for her safe return.

ELIJAH

Thank 'ee.

LORD OF THE MANOR

She is held in high regard by our staff.

Awkwardness. With no more to say, he turns to follow the Constable and his men.

Elijah watches him go for a while, then looks at James, who looks back. As he turns to leave, Bethia gets up from the floor and runs to him, tugging at his sleeve.

ELIJAH

(not looking at her)

Go to your mother. I go to the flock.

He marches down the lane out of the village. Bethia is alone as the CROWD DISPERSSES. She turns and sees James depart in the opposite direction and she begins to trot after him in order to keep up.

James is conscious that Bethia follows a step behind as they walk through the village, tries his best to ignore here as they continue.

JAMES

Leave me be.

BETHIA

I mean to thank 'ee.

JAMES

'Be no need for wandering the beach in the crook of night.

BETHIA

Da' said I could have died.

JAMES

No thanks to me, I'm certain.

Beat.

BETHIA
I won't tell anyone.

-- FLASH OF MOVEMENT, James grabs her and lifts her clear off the ground over his shoulder and runs with her out of the street into A SIDE LANE. He brings her down off his shoulder and squats in front of her, his hand on her throat.

They are intimately face to face, she stunned but not terrified.

JAMES
Wouldn't fare thee well for to e'en
think on that, do 'ee hear?

She nods emphatically. He recovers and slowly releases his grasp.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(intense)
Those other men are less kind than
I, Bethia. Far less kind.

His message understood, he stands up and walks back into the street. After a moment, she gets up and tracks after him as he disappears out of sight around the corner.

EXT. RED LION INN - CONTINUOUS

James approaches the door of the Inn with intent, trailed by the sprinting Bethia.

BETHIA
I saw her.

JAMES
'Ee saw nothing.

BETHIA
She swims in the water.

He spins on her.

JAMES
Go. Home!

BETHIA
(desperate)
Don't 'ee want to find her?

JAMES
Dearly I would.

BETHIA
Then why won't 'ee believe me?

JAMES
Don't 'ee think ee've done enough
damage?

Bethia is stunned for a moment, frowning in her tears.

POV: She watches as he disappears into the door of the inn,
which slams behind him -

MATCH CUT TO:

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. RED LION INN - NIGHT

- and immediately opens again, late in the cold night, and
disgorges James out into the street, paralytic and trembling,
immediately falling to the ground, eyes swimming.

After a beat, the landlord pokes his head out of the door to
inspect the damage and, with a sigh, emerges fully, steps
down to help an already rising James up from the floor.

LANDLORD
I'll not serve 'ee more, lad.

James moans an indecipherable objection, head still bowed.

LANDLORD (CONT'D)
It's not fair on 'ee as much as
anyone.

James uncoils and surfaces with a wide grin before gently -

JAMES
(singing)
"I'm lonesome since I crossed the
hill, / And o'er the moor and
valley, / -

LANDLORD
Don't 'ee go straight home now -

JAMES

(louder)

- "Such heavy thoughts my heart do fill," -

LANDLORD

Lord save us!

JAMES

(crescendo)

- "Since parting with my Sally!"

LANDLORD

Take a walk. The long way.

JAMES

(suddenly earnest)

Did 'ee sing when the bells rang out for victory?

LANDLORD

Aye.

JAMES

(low)

I tell 'ee, I see some strange, sad tales when I were abroad. Scraped the blood of a man from under my fingernails. Dogs with skin of the dead in their teeth.

Silence. He pauses before slapping the landlord on the shoulder to propel himself OFF INTO THE NIGHT, singing badly.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(singing)

"I'd rather range the world around,
/ and sail the stormy ocean, / Than
be in slavery chained and bound /
To one false-hearted maiden."

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bethia wakes up in the night. She turns to discover THE CANDLE alight on the side table. Sitting up, she also sees and the BEDROOM DOOR AJAR TO THE LANDING.

She frowns as she senses something wrong beneath her. HER HANDS runs down to the mattress beside her where A HEAVY SLICK OF FRESH CRIMSON BLOOD pools in the folds of the linen.

Horrified, she leaps out of bed over the blood and stands looking back at the bed stain.

Pulling her hands up, trembling, she realises that HER OWN HANDS ARE SLIGHTLY STREAKED.

She shakes her hands as if trying to shake the blood off but quickly resorts to wiping it on THE BLANKETS.

Panicking, she looks out through THE DOOR INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE LANDING. The TINIEST BREEZE blows her hair and it grounds her slightly, her breath slowing.

As if pulled by some force, she drifts out of the bedroom onto the landing, treading slowly and softly on the boards.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

She pads across the landing to the end where her parents sleep. In the faint light, she notices THE DOOR IS AJAR.

POV: She leans askance to peer through the slit and sees ELIJAH ASLEEP. The rest of the bed is deserted.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia descends the stairs slowly, feeling the breeze getting stronger as she sees THE WIDE OPEN FRONT DOOR into the HISSING WIND of the night outside.

She edges to the threshold, only THE BREEZE breaking the pregnant silence.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Stepping out into the deserted lane, Bethia listens to the slumber of the earth - watches THE TREES GENTLY SWAY AND RUSTLE in the breeze.

- Blended in with the breeze - A DISTANT FEMALE CRY - lost, ephemeral -

- Bethia whips her body round in the direction of the sound.

POV: She stares into the WOODS BEHIND THE COTTAGE - THE CRY AGAIN

Trembling, she accelerates towards the sound.

EXT. WOODS - CONTINUOUS

Bethia ducks and weaves through branches, breathing heavily when --

-- she breaks into a SMALL CLEARING to find JANE AND SUSANNAH ON THE GROUND, both in their nightgowns. Jane cradles the clearly distressed Susannah in between her legs.

Susannah's sobs are being muffled by JANE'S HAND LIGHTLY CLASPED OVER SUSANNAH'S MOUTH. She shushes Susannah gently in her ear as she MOANS.

POV: Bethia stares down and sees the bottom half of Susannah's gown is STAINED WITH BLOOD. Bethia catches Jane's eye as she wrestles with the convulsing body in her lap.

Bethia freezes where she stands, paralysed.

JANE
(hissing whisper)
Get 'ee to bed now.

BETHIA
(breaking into a sob)
I can't!

- A SHOUT IN THE DISTANCE - indecipherable, silences them all
- Susannah's cries turn into choked sobs.

- Pause. They hear only THE WIND before -

MALE VOICE
(shouting off)
Susannah!

- Susannah's eyes widen before her face curdles into terror.

BETHIA
James!

Jane is already on her feet. Susannah reaches out for her, a lost child.

SUSANNAH
Ma! Don't do nothing, I beg. Ma!

JANE
Sssh!
(to Bethia)
Come sit by 'er.

BETHIA
No!

JANE
(snapped)
Do it now!

Bethia cowers in response - moves to kneel by her sister, as Jane rockets forward, drawing herself up like a dog, ears pricked to locate the direction of the shouting.

MALE VOICE

(off)
Susannah!

JANE

(to herself)
By the 'ouse, 'Od save us!
(turning back to Bethia)
Stay here!

She darts off in the direction of the lane, leaving Bethia bereft. She gazes down at her sister, who looks back up her, tears pooling in her upturned face.

BETHIA

(frantic)
What 'appened?

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Jane marches down the lane towards the front of the house to find James already there, about to let rip again.

JAMES

(deep breath)
Sussan -

-- She grabs him by the lapels and SLAPS HIM ROUNDLY - TWICE - in the face. He stumbles backwards slightly, face wild with surprise and confusion, but she holds onto him, pressing her face into his.

JANE

(vengeful whisper)
Does 'ee wish death on all of us,
James Baldwin? Are thee gone mad?

He stares back at her, still stunned, hardly breathing, looking vaguely hurt.

JAMES

(blurting)
I do love her.

There is a pause. Though his eyes swim slightly, he holds her gaze. Jane softens her grip slightly in pity before -

- THE SOUND OF THE UPSTAIRS WINDOW OPENED - Jane whips round to see Elijah leaning out from the upstairs window.

ELIJAH

(firm)

What go on down 'ere, woman?

JANE

- Nothing. A lovesick boy is all.
He be on his way now.

ELIJAH

(loud)

I did warn you, Baldwin!

He disappears out of the window. Jane releases her grip entirely on James, who looks beyond her at -

- Susannah, face white as a sheet, waddling down the lane, - feeble but determined. Bethia serves as crutch as she inches painfully.

James scans down at the blood stained nightgown, aghast. His eyes swim up to meet those of Susannah, who stares back at him in silent communion.

Jane falters for a moment as she watches JAMES FACE FALL. She leaps in to grab him by the lapels once more.

JANE

Go!

James double-takes a little before he realises the situation, darts off and disappears into the village...

The FRONT DOOR flies open and Elijah marches out. Bethia glances up at him, before stepping in front of her sister so that she covers up the stained apron of Susannah's gown.

Seeing James escape, Elijah moves to jog after, but Jane catches him by the arm and he whirls around to face her, eyes ablaze.

JANE (CONT'D)

He be gone already.

He shrugs off her grasp.

ELIJAH

To hell, as sure as she will if I
don't put a stop to it.

He looks over to girls standing shivering now in the night, Susannah lowering her gaze.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Why the two of 'ee out?

JANE

They heard his caterwauling is all,
and followed me out.

Elijah treads over to them. Bethia reaches backwards with her arms and grips tightly around Susannah's legs to cover the mess.

Arriving, he looks down at Susannah's sickly complexion before reaching out a hand to lightly cup her face upwards so that her gaze meets his.

ELIJAH

(softly)
What ails 'ee, girl?

JANE

(walking up behind)
Just women's problems, mind. The
curse be upon her. She and I will
clear up.

Elijah drops his hand from Susannah's face briefly, and looks sheepishly away from his daughter. He pauses for a moment before awkwardly reaching back up and fingering a dank lock of sweat-stuck hair away from her forehead and over her ear.

Bethia looks up at this exchange while pressed between them.

Susannah looks up at her father, almost about to speak but he turns away again, looking awkwardly for inspiration in the night air before looking down on Bethia. He lays a hand on her head.

ELIJAH

'Suffer little children, and forbid
them not to come unto me, for such
is the kingdom of Heaven'

With a sigh, he lets his hand fall from Bethia's head.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

(turning away)
Finish up and get 'ee to bed.

He walks off in the direction of the house, leaving Jane, Bethia breathing again.

CU: Susannah's face, pale and white, almost ghostly and still, eyes staring straight ahead.

END OF FLASHBACK

CUT TO:

EXT. DURDLE DOOR COVE - MORNING

CU: THE BACK OF SUSANNAH'S HEAD as HER CORPSE floats face down in the waves.

CUT TO:

LONG SHOT: From the high cliff overlooking the cove, we just make out the bloated naked form of Susannah as it crashes against the rocks. SEAGULLS CRY as they SWARM AND DART around the corpse. A ROWING BOAT approaches from the beach.

INT. JANE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Jane wakes up in her bed in a start. Recovering, she looks over and sees that, as is usual, the other side of the bed is empty.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Dressed, Jane marches across the landing towards Bethia's room and snatches at the handle to enter -

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

- bursting through the door, she looks down to see that BETHIA'S BED IS EMPTY.

She sighs, turns on her heels and exits.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jane marches down the landing toward the opposite end to descend the stairs.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Jane enters into the empty common room, eerily quiet and cold. She pauses for a moment to consider the silence, almost sniffing the air - she can sense something is wrong.

Her eyes fall upon A TRAY OF COMPLETED DORSET BUTTONS, layered over each other to form a little pool of neatly sewn beauty, sitting on a small wooden tray on the sideboard by the window, illuminated by A STRONG BEAM OF SUNLIGHT.

She moves over to the tray and places HER HAND ON THE BUTTONS as if feeling for temperature, a sign, something.

Pause.

THE LIGHT ON THE BUTTONS is broken by A SHADOW PASSING BY THE WINDOW.

In shock, she twists to see who it is and in doing so knocks the tray to the ground. BUTTONS CRASH AND ROLL on the floor.

There is a LOUD THUMP on the front door - Jane freezes, before darting towards the sound -

CUT TO:

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - CONTINUOUS

Janes throws the cottage door open, only to discover the body of Elijah, sat slumped against the door, heaving great SOBS as he howls in grief.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - DAY

CU: A child's hand knocks on the glossy painted wood of the manor house door, which after time is opened by the bemused face of SAMWAYS, the elder footman.

He looks down and sees the diminutive Bethia standing beneath him on the porch step.

They stare at each other in silence for a moment, before they are distracted by THREE HORSES arriving by the front door, TWO of them hold the Constable and a FOOTMAN.

LORD OF THE MANOR

(off)

Bethia!

She turns to see the Master emerging from inside onto the porch, still putting on his riding coat.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

(stopping)

What are you doing here? I was not expecting you.

BETHIA

I came to see Sammy Tizard.

LORD OF THE MANOR

(kneeling)

You must stay here.

Whatever happens? Do you understand

(to Samways)

(MORE)

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
 Samways! Bring her inside and keep
 her till I return.

SAMWAYS
 (standing proud)
 Yessir.

The Master stands, leaves the porch, mounts his horse and steers it off the drive, where the pack breaks into a GALLOP and disappears as Bethia and Samways watch him go.

After a pause, Samways silently gestures for Bethia to step inside which she duly does.

INT. RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia stands in the hall as Samways SHUTS THE DOOR behind her and moves to her side. He joylessly points up THE GRAND STAIRCASE.

SAMWAYS
 Left at the top. First door on the
 right.

He waits, still pointing expectantly, as she processes the instructions in her head. After a moment, she moves off and gently treads up the side of the stairs grasping on the banister.

She turns halfway up to see Samways still waiting at the bottom for her to complete her journey. She looks up TO THE LANDING and makes her way up.

INT. TIZARD'S ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

We watch THE DOOR open as Bethia pokes her head around the edge, as she scans the room.

POV: Bethia sees AN EMPTY QUEEN SIZE BED in the centre of the room. Her eyes scan over to THE FLOOR where the surprised bruised face of Tizard weakly rises out of A PILE OF BEDCLOTHES on the floor.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - DAY

CU: An OAR lightly dips beneath the quiet surface with barely a splash and dives away only to repeat the cycle.

POV: We track behind a rowing boat as THREE MEN guide it into shore, where A SILENT CROWD OF STILL VILLAGERS stand waiting.

MONTAGE:

1. Jane watches and shivers standing in front of -
2. Elijah, eyes puffy and trembling slightly
3. The Lord of the Manor flanked by his constables
4. James, staring out, still water.

The oars on the rowing boat are raised as the vessel slides into THE SHALLOWS.

CU: The prow of the boat comes to a stop with a GENTLE CRUNCH OF PEBBLES as it beaches.

ONE OF THE MEN jumps deftly out and pulls the boat further up to shore, while the others make to stand.

The two men in the boat strain to lift A LONG BUNDLE OF RUGGED GREY WOOL from inside the boat. TWO CONSTABLES, who have been standing by the Lord of the Manor, start down to assist the third boatman as he waits to receive the bundle.

CU: Jane's EYES tear up, while the rest of her face remains motionless.

The boatmen and constables carry the bundle only a few steps up the beach and lay it softly down on the pebbles. They step away in a circle that frames the body. The FLAPS OF FABRIC tugged lightly by the breeze and threatening to unravel.

ONE OF THE MEN looks up from the circle in the direction of Elijah and Jane. A gesture to come forward and identify their daughter.

Jane steels herself - a beat - then takes a heavy but faltering couple of steps before -- she spins around almost to shield herself from the blast of a bomb, curled inwards.

Trembling, she looks back at Elijah, who responds to her stare by swallowing hard and switching his eyes to the path ahead. All the eyes of the gathered crowd turn to him.

He lurches forward, brushing past his wife to approach the body on the floor. Stumbling to a stop by the body, he looks around to the men, expecting someone to unveil it...

- when no-one does, he squats down to unwrap what he imagines to be the head of the bundle and fumbles at the cloth.

CU: Elijah's face as he looks down at what he finds.

CU: Jane's face still turned away, listens to the silence
PUNCTUATED ONLY BY THE WAVES -

- then broken again by ELIJAH'S SOBS, then a HOWL, FOOTSTEPS
ON PEBBLES, and a SUDDEN CONCERNED COMMOTION FROM THE CROWD.

Jane turns to discover that ELIJAH is in the water, thrashing
and wailing in the shadows, ripping at his clothing. The
three men and gathered others try to pull him back to shore,
but he breaks free many times, rolling in the water.

Finally, the crowd land Elijah on the beach by his daughter,
flat on his back and sobbing to the sky.

James steps out from the crowd, shaking in anger.

JAMES
(Shouting)
Damn this to hell!

The crowd, Jane and the Lord of the Manor all turn to him, as
he strides through them.

JAMES (CONT'D)
We all know who is to blame.

Elijah rises slowly from his back.

JAMES (CONT'D)
There be a monster among us. Up at
the house.

The Lord of the Manor shifts - glances at the constable.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(withering)
Under the protection of his
Lordship.

The Lord glances down to his constable's side as -

CU: The constable's HAND delicately moves down to the handle
of his TRUNCHEON, resting on his waistband.

James stalks to where the Lord's party stands.

JAMES (CONT'D)
(to the Lord)
Well?

LORD OF THE MANOR
You pay the dead no dignity.

JAMES

(laughing)

Dignity? I talk of revenge, Sir.

(turning to the crowd,
shouting)

The dead deserve revenge. That's what the bible tells us, Elijah? An eye for an eye? Well, are ye all going to stand idle while our betters do worse than nothing.

CONSTABLE

Hold your tongue, Baldwin.

JAMES

Or what? Our fairest Susannah lies broken. Does that not stir 'ee, your Lordship? She who worked under 'ee so closely for so long?

There is an innuendo in the air - The Lord smells it.

LORD OF THE MANOR

You're upset, Baldwin. We all are.

CONSTABLE

Stand back!

JAMES

(still approaching)

Someone tells me that you prized Susannah most high.

CONSTABLE

(screaming)

Now!

LORD OF THE MANOR

Who? Who told you this?

JAMES

(advancing on him)

A little bird --

-- A SUDDEN FLURRY: the constable whips his truncheon out and brings it down on James arm, who YELPS in pain before he grabs the constable's tunic with his free hand, leans in to headbutt the officer, who falls to the floor.

-- A MELEE ERUPTS. The other constables rush over but the younger men in the crowd block their path and beat them to the floor.

James is being wrestled by another constable aided by the Lord. In his struggle, HIS ELBOW DARTS BACK TO CLOCK THE MASTER IN THE NOSE, who falls back clutching it as it bleeds.

Elijah sits motionless on the beach as the chaos breaks around him. Jane arrives at his feet and stares down at him, as the noise of the fighting CRESCENDOS -

CUT TO:

INT. TIZARD'S ROOM - DAY

Bethia and Tizard sit on the end of the bed and watch as Samways places a SILVER TEA TRAY with ornate teapot, cups, milk jug on a dressing table near the door.

There is an awkward pause as he backs away in the direction of the door and exits.

Tizard stands and limps to the teapot, picks it gingerly from the tray as if it were made of glass and pours into the cup with a look of surprise and glee.

He smiles back at Bethia in triumph though his swollen face, before turning to the sugar bowl, dipping his finger in before sucking on it, winces in pain as it rubs in his mouth.

BETHIA

(after a moment)

Who did beat you, Sammy?

TIZARD

(shaking his head)

Dunno.

BETHIA

James thinks you did something to my 'Nanah.

TIZARD

But I did not.

Awkward pause.

TIZARD (CONT'D)

James did make me play games in the Lion. He fills me with drink and I've a mind to think that it be his fault I did fall asleep when I did.

Bethia stares at him. Her face starts to crease as tears come to her eyes.

BETHIA
 Why could 'ee not have stopped her?

Tizard is dumbstruck by the sight of Bethia. He comes to her.

TIZARD
 Oh, would I have done if were none
 so sleepy and drunken.

BETHIA
 I wish 'ee had been awake. I think
 she be lost.

TIZARD
 (taking her hand)
 But 'ee did say you saw her.

BETHIA
 (confused)
 I think I did.

TIZARD
 And that she be a mermaid?

She nods her head.

BETHIA
 'Ee did see her too.

TIZARD
 (concentrating)
 I think I did. But I did never see
 one afore. I dussen know what they
 look like.

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

The door opens from the drawing room into the same library
 from before, and Bethia enters before beckoning in a wide-
 eyed, limping Tizard.

Bethia moves to end of the room where she first saw the map.
 Tizard trails behind, cowered by the towers of books as he
 passes.

TIZARD
 I doesn't read. I hates books.

BETHIA
 It matters what you read though.

Bethia reaches the map and points at the place where the mermaid is. Tizard follows her finger and closes in on the map, squinting to make out the illustration.

INSERT: The Mermaid sitting as before. The fin protruding from the inked waves.

He stares at it for a while before -

BETHIA (CONT'D)

Well?

He turns to see her, staring up at him, tugging at his sleeve. She looks at him intently, still wretched. He hesitates a moment before looking away.

Bethia watches his gaze turn to the window, and his eyes widen and mouth falls agape. She follows his gaze and turns to the window and peers out to the front of the house.

POV: In the distance, a CROWD OF VILLAGERS led by James storm up the main drive towards the house.

Bethia gasps and grabs Tizard away from the window, pulling him down from sight.

TIZARD

What goes on?

BETHIA

I think ... they come for thee!

Tizard stares blankly at her before -

- A THUNDEROUS KNOCKING and CLAMOUR from the front door (off)

INT. RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Samways arrives behind THE DOOR just as Bethia and Tizard emerge from the drawing room adjoining the library. He checks them with a disappointed glance before -

- MORE THUNDEROUS KNOCKING -

JAMES

(off)

Open up. We know he be in there.

SAMWAYS

Where is my master?

JAMES

(off)

Never mind you that! Bring out the murderer.

- JEERS OF AGREEMENT from the gathered men -

SAMWAYS

I know nothing of murder. Get 'ee gone!

JAMES

(screaming, off)

There be a dead girl in the cove will tell 'ee all, if she can be woken. Heaven knows I'd wrench her from the claws of Satan if I could. But my hands are only fit for your neck, Sammy Tizard!

Bethia freezes - Samways gestures frantically to Tizard.

SAMWAYS

(sotto voce, gritted teeth)

The kitchen door. Go on!

TIZARD

(panicked, to Bethia)

Girl!

Bethia doesn't reply - still frozen.

SAMWAYS

Now!

Tizard feints a little before bolting out of the room. Samways looks at Bethia still eyes fixed on the door.

CU: Bethia's EYES WIDE- the THUNDEROUS ROAR OF KNOCKING grows ever louder under -

Samways goes to lift Bethia off the ground to move her out of danger but she suddenly comes alive and wriggles desperately.

BETHIA

No! Let me go!

EXT. PORCH, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

CU: James suddenly squints to listen.

INT. RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia wrenches herself free from Samway's clutches and dashes out in pursuit of Tizard.

BETHIA
Sammy!

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- SMASH - A window is broken -

CU: Multiple shadows cross the mermaid on the map.

INT. MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia runs through through the DOWNSTAIRS CORRIDORS, in and out of rooms, searching -

BETHIA
(screaming, repeated)
Sammy! Sammy! Sammy!

She stops and listens - first, ANOTHER WINDOW BREAKS OFF -

Then she hears a voice -

TIZARD
(off)
Bethia!

She follows the noise to A STAIRCASE where she darts downstairs into -

INT. TRADE RECEPTION HALL, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- she dashes through past the kitchen into the cloakroom area to grab hold of Tizard as he stands by the EXTERNAL DOOR at the other end.

BETHIA
They'll see you!

A CRASH from upstairs makes them both jolt.

TIZARD
They be inside already.
(grabs her)
I'll find your sister.

BETHIA

What?

TIZARD

I'll find Susannah. I promise 'ee.

BETHIA

(panicked)

But -

Tizard embraces her while speaking into her ear.

TIZARD

I believe 'ee.

He pats her clumsily on the head before ANOTHER CRASH spurs him to release her. He opens the door quickly and dashes out.

Bethia pauses briefly, before turning into the frame to look out at where Tizard has darted -

POV: She watches as he runs limping into the back fields of the estate in the direction of A LONG BANK OF TREES. He manages to make some distance before -

- A ROAR as James and FOUR MEN from the mob emerge suddenly from the side and charge after Tizard.

BETHIA

(screaming)

No!

EXT. MANOR HOUSE BACK GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Tizard hears the ROAR and Bethia's scream, turns to see the men sprinting towards him across the grass. Wailing, he takes off but he is too slow and suddenly --

-- ONE OF THE MEN tackles him to the ground and sets upon him with fists.

Bethia runs as fast as she can behind the men but is still some distance. She gapes as she watches James and the men pull the SCREAMING Tizard to his feet.

James is handed A ROPE by one of the men and grabbing Tizard roughly from behind, he wraps the rope around the boy's neck. Tizard gasps, wide-eyed, screaming throughout.

BETHIA

(getting closer)

Leave him be!

James and the men QUICKLY KNOT THE ROPE at the back of his neck and let Tizard drop to the ground, frantically gasping and pulling at the noose as it throttles him.

Bethia arrives and scrambles to intervene, pushing at James who swats her away with his free hand. The men pull the rope and drag Tizard along the ground in the direction of the first of the bank of trees -

When they get there, James takes the end of the rope and throws it up over the lowest bough while the other men pull the still screaming Tizard to his feet --

-- BANG! The tree above their heads CRACKS with a passing gunshot. James and the men instinctively duck and drop the rope and Tizard who falls to the ground by Bethia.

James turns to the Manor House and sees TWO REDCOAT SOLDIERS aiming rifles at them, a puff of smoke still rising.

Bethia helps Tizard squeeze the noose off his head as he fights to regain his breath.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
(whispered to Tizard)
Run, Sammy! Go and find her!

Coming to, Tizard looks at her and nods. He flicks a glance around before stumbling to his feet and running into the remaining bank of trees that leads into WOODLANDS.

James sees this and starts to make after Tizard before --

-- CRACK! Another gunshot WHISTLES closer. He and the man duck again and raise their hands in surrender. Bethia watches as TIZARD DISAPPEARS BEHIND LEAVES AND SHRUBS.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE FRONT - MOMENTS LATER

The CROWD OF MEN lie on the ground on the drive, hands over their heads in surrender, including James. A ring of further RED COAT SOLDIERS, backed up by an OUTER RING OF RED COAT SOLDIERS on horseback.

Bethia sits on the porch steps, guarded by the two redcoats from before, - she looks to where the Lord of the Manor, bruised and bleeding, dismounts from his own steed.

By his side, Bethia sees her father there looking wretched. The two of them walk toward her, finding a path through the impromptu labyrinth created by the supine villagers.

As they pass him, James exchanges glances with both of them

As they arrive at Bethia's feet, she stares into her father's bloodshot eyes.

BETHIA
Sammy got away from here.

ELIJAH
He's not to blame. Time to come home.

BETHIA
James said they found someone.

Elijah nods slowly.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
It's not Nannah. It can't be.

ELIJAH
It is. I know it. I saw her.

Bethia tenses as if trying to push down something that is rising inside of her.

BETHIA
Would 'ee swear it? On the bible?

At that, Elijah covers his face with his hand and turns his back on her as he sits cross legged on the ground.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
(crying)
Da'?

Elijah simply puts his free hand up in acknowledgement. Bethia spoons her father's back and buries her head in his shoulder, while she feels his chest heave with more sobs.

James looks on from his position on the ground.

The Lord of the Manor steps over and rests his hands on Bethia's shoulder.

LORD OF THE MANOR
Bethia?

Bethia stands up from her father's back and turns to face the master.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Why don't you come inside for a moment? Let your father rest.

Bethia tearfully nods.

INT. DRAWING ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

Bethia sits uncomfortably on an ornate chair. She stares at the door to the library.

LORD OF THE MANOR
What do you think happened to your
sister?

Bethia's daydream is broken as she shifts her focus to the master as he sits on a similar chair opposite her.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Young Baldwin thinks that Tizard is
responsible.

A pause.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Personally, I think he is harmless.

He pauses at the end, driving it as a question with his eyes. Bethia responds with a quick, small nod.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Susannah was a special young woman.

Bethia looks away again to the library door.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
She was very proud of you.

Bethia quickly turns her head back again, eyes alive.

BETHIA
Why?

LORD OF THE MANOR
She said that you were funny, and
stubborn ... that you had a strong
imagination.

A pause.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Did you say something to - James -
about Susannah's service here?

Pause. Bethia stares back at the master, tight-lipped. He returns her glare with a straight bat, holding firm on the question.

After a moment, she yields, first staring down into her lap and then away to the library door once more.

POV: She focuses on the gap in the door - we close in and discover -

BEGIN FLASHBACK

- CU: Bethia's EYES peering through the gap.

INT. LIBRARY, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

She peers through and sees The Lord of the Manor talking to the out of sight Susannah, before himself moving toward her and disappearing out of sight.

Bethia, frustrated, walks through into -

INT. DRAWING ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

- AN ETHEREAL BRIGHTNESS - she moves freely into the space to discover The Lord of the Manor and Susannah standing in close proximity.

Though Bethia stands in plain view, it is clear that her sister and the Master pay no attention to her.

CU: Bethia's EYES - watches unblinking, impassive as -

The Lord closes in on Susannah, brings his hand up to her breast and strokes it gently. Susannah doesn't take her eyes from him as he does so.

CU: Bethia's EYES - still watching -

The Lord leans in and slowly kisses Susannah on the lips, and she opens her mouth to him in hunger.

CU: Bethia's EYES - still watching -

FLASH CUT to -

Susannah straddling the Lord as he sits on the same ornate chairs, her maid livery in a state of undress as he rocks into her, grabbing at her thighs.

CU: Bethia's EYES - blinking - then again -

FLASH CUT TO:

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

As previous flashback - Elijah walks off into THE HOUSE, Bethia stands in front of Susannah to guard her.

CU: Susannah's face, pale white, staring straight ahead.

As Elijah disappears into the house, Bethia steps apart and turns to look at her sister, almost catatonic, eyes glazed in pain. Bethia stares again at the BLOOD-STAINED SKIRT FRONT of Susannah -

Bethia, breathing heavy, turns to her mother, whose frame collapses in the aftermath of Elijah's presence - she too looks away, paying Bethia no heed.

After a second, Bethia bolts away in the same direction that James disappeared to -

Jane tries to grab her as she runs past but to no avail -

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia arrives breathless - the sky is already starting to break into the twilight of morning. Framed in silhouette on the grass, James sits cross-legged.

She bolts up to him and rains blows as hard on his head and shoulders, as he feebly raises his arms in defence.

Eventually, he resists and grabs her arms, holds them still.

JAMES
Enough! Stop!

BETHIA
(screaming)
Leave her alone!

JAMES
Stop it!

BETHIA
Leave her alone!

JAMES
(shouting)
I did leave her alone!

He throws her off so that she lands on her bottom opposite him. A respite.

JAMES (CONT'D)
She wouldn't see me. She bid me stay away. Because of damned Elijah. I didn't know what had come to pass afore now.

BETHIA

All was right with us before 'ee
came back.

JAMES

Well. Many's a time I've supposed I
should have died in France.

BETHIA

I was happy.

JAMES

(sudden flash of anger)
Because 'ee is a child! And then
you has to grow up. As I did - I
was a child too. But God does open
your eyes, child, and you sees all
the filth and guts of this world.
And you want to close your eyes
again. Forever. Until then, 'ee
know nothing - child!

BETHIA

(angered)
I know something though.

JAMES

What do 'ee know?

BETHIA

I know something.

We draw in on Bethia's face, as she sneers in preparation for
a *coup de gras*. The audio fades into silence until the
following MONTAGE/INTERCUT is in dumb show -

CU: James' face listening.

CU: Bethia's lips moving to talk.

INTERCUT - DRAWING ROOM - The Lord and Susannah look at the
camera while copulating

CU: Jame's face listening.

CU: Bethia's eyes while she talks.

INTERCUT - DRAWING ROOM - Susannah convulsed by love throes.

END OF FLASHBACK - BACK TO PRESENT

INT. DRAWING ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

The Lord sits across from her, as he was before, still waiting for the answer.

Bethia freezes, clenching her limbs tight.

The Lord stands up, walks behind his chair and lifts it closer to Bethia and sits down again on it so that they are almost knee to knee. Bethia stares downward.

BETHIA

(quiet)

I know what I believes to be true.

LORD OF THE MANOR

(low)

It is possible, is it not, that when something is important to us, when we want to guard something dear to us, that we can desire something to be true, even if the evidence is wholly contrary?

Bethia's eyes flick upward.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

Is it more likely, for instance, that your sister transformed into a mermaid -

He pauses for emphasis. Bethia lets out a breath -

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

- or that she was overwhelmed by what had happened to her, that she couldn't carry that burden any longer, no matter how much any of us wanted to share that burden, and that she alone made that terrible decision - to walk into the / sea-

His hand reaches out to Bethia, at which she rockets to her feet, sending the ornate chair she sits on bolting backwards.

Beat - before she springs out of the room.

EXT. MANOR HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia runs out of the house into the midst of a mass arrest of the mob of villagers. Redcoats load men, handcuffed, onto the back of a cart, including James.

Elijah sits on the ground, head in his hands. Bethia, crying, crashes into him, throwing her arms around his neck.

James looks over at the sight and then spots the Lord of the Manor emerging from the house.

Bethia holds onto her father tighter and tighter as the Master approaches. Elijah seeing the master come close, pulls himself to his feet.

LORD OF THE MANOR

With your blessing, I've made arrangements for Susannah to be laid to rest in St. Andrew's. I've given instructions for a full service, when you have - prepared.

ELIJAH

(stunned)

I - I be not -

LORD OF THE MANOR

(gesturing)

There is no debt to be paid. It is the least that can be afforded you in such circumstances.

ELIJAH

(indicating James et al)

What will become of them?

LORD OF THE MANOR

That will be for the bench. In essence, they have acted against officers of the Crown.

Bethia looks over to James, who seems to sense it and returns the look.

ELIJAH

And Tizard?

LORD OF THE MANOR

I cannot tell. Given his ordeal, I wouldn't be surprised if he never returns.

Bethia looks at the Master, who stares back at him.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

He may have been witness that night, but the testimony of one with the mind of a child is of little use.

He turns and walks away into the house, as Bethia watches him leave.

INT. ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH - NIGHT

THE COFFIN CONTAINING SUSANNAH sits on a bier before the altar of the church, now lit up by a few candles on stands.

Jane and Bethia stand in the aisle, side by side, having just stepped in. They do not hold hands.

POV: Bethia looks down the aisle at the seemingly distant coffin in front of her. It feels miles long, although it is a matter of feet.

CU: Bethia's face as she trembles - with the cold?

BETHIA

What does I do?

JANE

(staring straight ahead)

What think 'ee there to do? There be nothing.

Bethia looks up to Jane to try and read her.

JANE (CONT'D)

Sit with her.

She looks deadpan to Bethia to emphasise her point. Bethia takes a breath and inches her way down the aisle towards it. Jane stays still and watches her move closer.

Bethia edges still closer to the coffin. When she is within touching distance, she stops and studies the length of wood. After a moment, she turns around to face Jane again.

BETHIA

(quietly, innocently)

Is she in there?

Jane nods quietly. A tear falls down her cheek.

JANE

Does 'ee want to look?

Bethia looks at the coffin.

BETHIA

Da' said she be in heaven.

(turning back to Jane)

Will she look like an angel?

Jane treads towards her daughter.

JANE

No. She won't.

(taking a deep breath)

She be in the sea for a long time so... she be pale. Her body do smash against rocks and barnacles. There be great gashes and slashes across her breast. Bloody flaps and holes in her flesh.

C.U. Bethia's face tilts up in horror. Jane has reached her by this point.

JANE (CONT'D)

And her face: she'd smashed most of her teeth. When they found her, the birds been at her. They be still pulling crabs off her when they landed her. Landed her!

(she chokes)

She got no eyes, my love. Just black holes where the eyes should be.

CU: Bethia's face absorbs all of this silently.

Jane recovers her composure into flinty deadpan again.

JANE (CONT'D)

Now. Does 'ee still want to look?

Bethia holds her mother steady in her gaze ... before nodding gently.

BETHIA

I think I must.

For the first time, Jane smiles at daughter, leans down carefully to plant a kiss on her daughter's forehead.

Jane then turns and moves away off into the darkened side aisles before returning with A SINGLE WOODEN CHAIR, which she places alongside the coffin.

She beckons Bethia to stand on it, which she dutifully does, before circling the coffin once more to the other side.

She finds the edges of the lid and begins to lift it off with both hands, placing it deftly on the ground. The sound of the lid dropping onto stone ECHOES around the empty nave.

POV: from Susannah's view, looking up from her resting place, we see Bethia's wide-eyed face slowly hove into view, before creasing and cracking with tears.

We pull back to see - Susannah, intact, in her night gown, serenely reclined in her coffin, eyes open, smiling benignly back up at Bethia.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
 (sobbing)
 I'm sorry, 'Nannah! I'm so sorry.

SUSANNAH
 (not moving)
 Sssh!

She raises her hand softly to dry her tears.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
 N'night silly!

BETHIA
 (weak)
 N'night!

We hear the funeral service over the next movement -

PARSON
 (v.o.)
 "but whether there be prophecies,
 they shall fail; whether there
 be tongues, they shall cease;
 whether there be knowledge, it
 shall vanish away.

We pull back to see Bethia standing on the chair alongside the coffin. Jane is no longer standing there.

PARSON (CONT'D)
 (v.o.)
 For we know in part, and we
 prophesy in part. But when that
 which is perfect is come, then that
 which is in part shall be done
 away.

We pull slowly further back down the nave so that the scene retreats into the distance.

PARSON (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

As we reach the door, there is FLASH OF FIN as it flicks up above the level of the coffin.

EXT. ST. ANDREW'S CHURCHYARD - DAY

SOIL lands heavily on Susannah's COFFIN as it lies in the GROUND. We pull back to see the SMALL FUNERAL PARTY gathered around the plot, including the PARSON, the Lord of the Manor, a handful of villagers, Jane, Elijah and Bethia.

Elijah weeps and wrings his hat in front of him.

CU: Bethia's face looks down at the coffin, serene, a faint relaxed smile on her lips.

Jane stares at Bethia with furrowed brow, concerned and slightly contemptuous.

CUT TO:

At the end of the service, THE PARTY is already exiting the yard. Jane, Bethia and Elijah are the last to trudge the church path to its exit. Behind, the Parson and the Lord of the Manor talk.

Elijah, shaking and trembling, suddenly stops walking. Bethia and Jane reach the CHURCH GATEHOUSE before they realise that Elijah has stalled.

Bethia turns around and looks at Elijah, who continues to shake and hyperventilate. He catches Bethia's eye before he calls to them.

ELIJAH

Go on home.

He turns back up the path to the church. Bethia and Jane watch as they see him approach the parson and lean in for conversation.

They see the PARSON'S EXPRESSION furrow with concern and he glances at the Lord of the Manor, before leading Elijah inside the church and disappear.

The Lord of the Manor stares back down at Bethia and Jane. Jane looks vaguely concerned before taking Bethia's hand to drag her off.

JANE

Come now.

Reluctantly, still trying to spot her father, she accompanies her mother through the gatehouse into the lane.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A CANDLE FLICKERS AND HISSES on the table.

Jane sits alone at the table picking at A DORSET BUTTON but the actions are stilted, slow and absent minded. She stares straight ahead rather than focused on her hands.

Bethia sits opposite her, watching her mother's atypically slow work. After a moment -

JANE

'Ee should go to bed.

BETHIA

But Da' -

JANE

- Could be he don't return for hours. I dunno. Go on.

With some resistance in her body, she stands up and wades towards the stairs, picking up an another lit candle, and pausing briefly at the foot of them to look back at her mother, who continues to pick fruitlessly the buttons.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia stands apart from HER EMPTY BED, staring at the covers lit up by candle light. It looks strangely imposing in the light and uninviting.

After a moment -

-- A LOUD KNOCKING from the front door downstairs. She gasps.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Jane sits at the table opposite the Parson and The Lord of the Manor. The Constable and Samways stand behind the seated men. Bethia stands eyes wide a couple of steps behind Jane, who looks down in her lap.

There is an awkward silence, a sense of a rotting carcass having been dropped on the table. The Parson looks around at his party before continuing.

PARSON

(precise)

I am, of course, duty bound by some adherence to a seal of confession when it comes to revelations of this kind. Which is why Elijah's coming to me in this way presents theological...difficulties...

Pause. Jane's eyes flick up in contempt.

PARSON (CONT'D)

...nevertheless, I would have been content to keep to my charge. It was, however, only with the mildest of suggestion that Elijah was convinced of the need to inform the constable also. Thus, here we are.

Silence. Jane does not move. The Parson looks like he is struggling to finish. The silence compels him to continue.

PARSON (CONT'D)

(vulnerable)

I should add that, it seems to me, Elijah has been motivated by the most severe miscomprehension of scripture that I have encountered in the laity. That he thought, he could have, in some manner better prepared your daughter's soul for heaven through his actions. But for his conscience, that seems to have put him on the wrack these last days, we might never have been able to disabuse him of his most pernicious belief and false understanding of our Lord's mercy.

There is further silence. Jane still hasn't moved.

BETHIA

I don't understand. Ma'?

LORD OF THE MANOR
My men are here to escort you to
visit with him -

JANE
(blunt)
-No.

LORD OF THE MANOR
-should you so desire - it would-

JANE
- No! Get you gone!

BETHIA
- Ma'!

PARSON
- Madam, -

JANE
(bursting to her feet)
- No! Get out! I will not go with
'ee. Nor any of 'ee. You all! Go
now! GO!

With that she disappears up the stairs. Bethia is left alone.

There is a silent agreement amongst the men to depart. The
parson stands. The rest shuffle towards the door. Only the
Lord of the Manor remains seated.

LORD OF THE MANOR
Bethia? Do you wish to visit?

They all stop and wait for her response.

BETHIA
My father. Is in prison?

LORD OF THE MANOR
(nods)
Will you go?

Bethia turns back in the direction of her absent mother.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)
Bethia?

BETHIA
I dussen know.

LORD OF THE MANOR

What is it that John says,
Reverend? "And you will know the
truth, and the truth will set you
free." Don't you want to be free?

BETHIA

I be scared.

LORD OF THE MANOR

I will be with you.

Pause.

BETHIA

Then I think I must go.

The Lord nods his acceptance of her choice.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - NIGHT

Bethia sits in A CARRIAGE opposite the Lord of the Manor as
it rockets through the dark.

INT. DORCHESTER GAOL - NIGHT

Bethia is led along the CORRIDOR OF THE NEW GAOL WING by a
party of The Lord of the Manor and TWO PRISON OFFICERS.

They reach A CELL which one of the prison officers steps
forward to open. Bethia cannot yet see inside but the open
door is an invitation. She turns to the Lord for a signal -
his eyes give her tacit encouragement and she enters.

INT. CELL - CONTINUOUS

POV: Bethia treads into the cell and sees THE FIGURE OF HER
FATHER RECUMBENT ON THE BED, turned away from her. He makes
no effort to turn around.

BETHIA

Da'?

ELIJAH

Please, lamb. Please leave.

BETHIA

(steps closer)

Da'? Will 'ee not face me.

ELIJAH

I cannot.

BETHIA

(broken)

Please Da'! I'll not leave.

Slowly and with an immense fight against gravity, Elijah rolls himself over without looking at her and sets his legs on the floor to bring himself up to a barely upright seated position, his head hanging down, face invisible.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

Ma' won't. I don't understand what goes on.

Pause.

ELIJAH

We buried your sister. Did 'ee not remember.

BETHIA

(outburst)

Da'! 'Ee be scaring me.

Elijah raises his head finally, and Bethia sees him for the first time, lank hair, pale tired skin and bloodshot eyes. She is taken aback.

ELIJAH

Be your sister a mermaid?

Bethia chokes on the answer, but it leaves her mouth nonetheless.

BETHIA

I don't believe that.

ELIJAH

Then what did happen to her.

CU: Bethia's eyes, moving, thinking, rapidly.

BETHIA

She did walk into the sea -

ELIJAH

Aye. She did.

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK -

INT. RED LION INN, LULWORTH - NIGHT

Elijah sits at the table where he met James. He looks shell shocked. James and his men exit the inn. James turns around briefly before he exits, looking guiltily at Elijah.

They leave and the door slams, leaving Elijah and the Landlord alone.

CU: Elijah's face is the battleground of anger and sadness.

LANDLORD
'Ee alright, 'Lijah.

Elijah looks up, seemingly startled.

ELIJAH
Are thee still serving?

LANDLORD
Ale? Long time passed since I
served 'ee.

ELIJAH
Well 'en. For old time's sake then.

CUT TO:

Elijah brings a TANKARD OF ALE to his lips and drinks angrily, to the bottom.

CUT TO:

Elijah head down at the table, the Landlord at his side. He prods Elijah on the shoulder, who sits upright, squinting angrily.

LANDLORD
Far less trouble than 'ee were,
Elijah. I did fear the worst.

ELIJAH
(worn out)
I am saved. I have known grace.

LANDLORD
'Ee don't see much of it 'ere, I
say. Only the dark hearts of man.

ELIJAH
(strange)
Then I pity 'ee.
(MORE)

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

Thy needs the grace of God to save
'ee or else know only torment and
eternal agony.

The Landlord is freaked. Elijah closes his eyes to remember.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

"And the sea gave up the dead which
were in it - and death and hell
were cast in the lake of fire. This
is the second death."

His eyes open again. A pause.

LANDLORD

Get 'ee home, 'Lijah.

EXT. RED LION INN - NIGHT

Elijah steps out of the inn into the night air. He feels it
on his face for a moment, slightly refreshed.

He looks up the lane first, and then turns his face back to
the sea breeze. The MOONLIGHT illuminates his face.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - NIGHT

The moonlit cove sits pregnant waiting for events to replay.

As before, but now in MONTAGE:

1. Susannah, tearful, looks out to sea.
2. Her CLOTHES AND SHOES in a neat pile, she walks off the
beach into the ocean.
4. Tizard gains consciousness for a moment and sees the
distant figure of Susannah diving into the waves.
5. Susannah becoming out of depth, the water up to her neck,
beginning to swim.

END OF MONTAGE -

Susannah swims further out, out of the horseshoe of the cove,
in open water, waves overlapping her in the darkness.
Eventually, GURGLING AND CHOKING, she slips beneath the
surface.

There is a SILENCE.

- SUSANNAH BURSTS THROUGH THE SURFACE, GASPING, coughing and flailing at the water. Her eyes open and her head whips around to find the shore. She sees the ROCKS OF THE COVE under MOONLIGHT.

Susannah swims the long swim back to shore - a sudden primal need to survive - but it is hard...

...She finally arrives at the beach, finding her feet on the pebbles beneath the surface, she stumbles to extricate herself, gagging and retching on sea water.

She looks up and sees A FIGURE emerge out of the shadows. It is ELIJAH who stares down at her.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. CELL - NIGHT

Elijah looking at Bethia as he finishes his revelation. He looks as if he wants to continue but -

ELIJAH
(struggling)
Then - it was -

He breaks down and his head falls down to weep between his knees again.

Bethia sits and absorbs this for a second. Her eyes spy on the barred window sill, ELIJAH'S BIBLE. She stands and walks over to it. Taking it in her hands, she turns and walks away with it in her hands.

She finds the ribbon bookmark in the dog-eared and begins to open it at the indicated page, but as she does so THE LOOSE PAGES FALL OUT ON THE FLOOR AT HER FEET.

BETHIA
Will 'ee go to Hell?

ELIJAH
I was always bound for there. I was a sinner. The old parson knew it. I knew it. Your mother knew it.

BETHIA
And Susannah?

ELIJAH
I fear I did drag her with me.

Bethia pauses for a moment before she drops THE BIBLE ON THE FLOOR, its pages coming apart from the binding completely, and runs out of the cell.

INT. DORCHESTER GAOL - CONTINUOUS

Bethia runs out of the cell straight into the arms of the Lord of the Manor. The prison guard slams the cell behind her.

BETHIA
 (anxious, to the Lord)
 I did - did lie about what I saw at
 the House. I did lie.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 I know.

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

INT. DRAWING ROOM, MANOR HOUSE - DAY

CU: Bethia's eyes spy into the room from the ajar door to the library.

The Lord of the Manor stands opposite Susannah.

SUSANNAH
 Begging 'or forgiveness, I hoped to
 speak to your Lordship.

He nods assent.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)
 You know of Lulworth soldiers
 returned from France.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 Indeed I do.

SUSANNAH
 Many suffer greatly. There are too
 many hands in the field and not
 enough work.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 It is a matter of grave concern
 abroad in the country.

SUSANNAH
 Could your Lordship find work for
 but one who would serve you well?

LORD OF THE MANOR

Who?

SUSANNAH

Baldwin's son, young James.

A moment of decision and tacit pleading from Susannah.

LORD OF THE MANOR

I will ask Samways to consider the matter. But I cannot offer any promise in this.

SUSANNAH

Of course, your Lordship. Thank your Lordship.

She breaks down, she buckles slightly as if to faint, her hand grabs at a nearby mantle. The Lord swoops in to stop her from falling.

SUSANNAH (CONT'D)

(overcome, crying)

I'm sorry, Sir. I be not feeling myself.

The Lord offers her an awkward embrace and sits her down on one of the chairs, kneeling beside her.

LORD OF THE MANOR

There, there. We will endeavour to help you. Tell me everything.

She nods before turning to notices the open library door in the corner.

POV: Bethia sees Susannah and The Lord come right towards her. Susannah approaches and kneels down, staring right into the camera.

FLASH MATCH CUTAWAY: From the dream sequence, Susannah screaming underwater into camera.

BACK TO FLASHBACK -

Susannah stares into camera, speaking with the voice of the Lord of the Manor.

SUSANNAH

(synced to Lord of the Manor)

Why did you lie, Bethia?

END OF FLASHBACK -

INT. DORCHESTER GAOL - AS BEFORE

CU: Bethia's eyes - blinking

LORD OF THE MANOR
Why did you lie, Bethia?

Bethia is baffled and distraught.

BETHIA
I - I dussen know. I wanted - I
hated James. I wanted him to stay
away, but I never thought - I never
knew. I'm sorry.

LORD OF THE MANOR
You don't need my forgiveness,
Bethia. The Lord will grant you
mercy, I'm sure.

BETHIA
(sobbing)
I won't be going to hell, will I? I
don't want to go to hell. Please
Lord forgive me. I don't want to go
to Hell.

LORD OF THE MANOR
I doubt you will see damnation. But
there will be purgatory, I fear.
You are beginning to endure it now.
But others will judge you, Bethia.
You must prepare yourself for that.

Bethia nods, still broken by tears. She throws herself in his arms and he holds onto her, overwhelmed by the force of her.

INT. JAMES' CELL - NIGHT

James lies on his cot in the darkness. The BOLT IS DRAWN and the DOOR CREAKS OPEN. His body is illuminated by the entry of oil lamps and THE LORD OF THE MANOR.

James raises himself to face the visitor. His blinking eyes make out the shrinking Bethia peeking out from behind the Lord's coat tails.

CUT TO:

James sits on the end of his bed. The Lord of the Manor and Bethia sit opposite him on chairs brought in. The prison guards stand by the door.

LORD OF THE MANOR

(wrapping up)

I consider you to have acted under
inconceivable duress and at a time
when certain pertinent facts were
hidden from us all.

James glance becomes fixed on Bethia, who feels it burn her.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

In light of this, I have spoken to
the constable and the governor and
given my instruction that no
further charges are to be brought
against you, or indeed the others.

James looks back at the Lord of the Manor for clarification.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

You are free to leave, Baldwin.

JAMES

(cynical)

I damn near well hung Tizard in
your gardens.

The Lord reacts to this with sheepish acknowledgement. James
turns to Bethia again in his stare.

JAMES (CONT'D)

(bitter)

Free! Ha! What freedom do I
possess, eh? I have the freedom to
starve in the streets for want of
bread. My service forgotten, spent.
She was my freedom! She was my ship
on the ocean! My escape from all
this - earth and nonsense.

(to Bethia)

And you! You turned her memory into
a whore! And I turned this against
her in her innocence.

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - NIGHT

Elijah moves a lock of Susannah's hair from her forehead

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Elijah steps inside the house, but hears a KERFUFFLE and then SUDDEN FOOTSTEPS FADING OUT. He turns and looks out of the front window to see Bethia running off. He thinks before -

He moves to the door and opens it ajar, peering carefully through the gap -

POV: He sees Jane helping the weakened Susannah back off to the woods. Then: her BLOODSTAINED SKIRT.

INT. LANDING, BETHIA'S HOUSE - MOMENTS LATER

Elijah arrives at the landing and looks in the direction of -

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

He enters into the bedroom to find THE BLOODSTAINED SHEETS, lit up starkly by the light of the lamp.

INT. RED LION INN, LULWORTH - NIGHT

Elijah sits in the corner of the Red Lion with James on the other side.

JAMES

I've not seen her. She bid me away.

ELIJAH

(insistent, aggressive)

'Ee expect me to believe that. Who gave her then this bloody untimely birth?

JAMES

She warned me. T'would be bad for her.

ELIJAH

What does that mean?

James is reluctant but Elijah suddenly grabs him across the table. The Landlord and James' men are startled in the other side of the inn.

ELIJAH (CONT'D)

(growled, crescendo)

"Do not prostitute thy daughter, to cause her to be a whore, lest the land fall to whoredom"

JAMES
 (fearful)
 There may be another cause.

Elijah pauses as he stares into the eyes of a feared James.

CUT TO:

Elijah sits at the table in shock as James and his men exit the inn. James turns back sheepishly as he exits, guilty.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. JAMES' CELL - NIGHT

Bethia is stung deeply by this. The weight of her conscience sits heavily upon her - bewildering.

BETHIA
 'Ee told him that?

JAMES
 I will never be free of my part in this. So leave me in chains. It would be the same.

With that, he lies back on the bed and turns over, leaving an awkward silence and Bethia bereft.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAWN TWILIGHT

Bethia sits in the carriage opposite the Lord as it leaves Dorchester behind, twists of early morning smoke from its chimneys already filling the air.

EXT. VILLAGE GREEN - MORNING

THE CARRIAGE pulls to a stop as the sun comes up.

Samways is there to jump down from the driver's seat and open THE CARRIAGE DOOR, pulling steps down in the process. He puts a hand out to aid Bethia as she steps down onto the lane.

The Lord of the Manor looks out at her from inside the carriage. She looks around her at the absence of life.

LORD OF THE MANOR
 (uninspired)
 Run home now.

The door is closed and the carriage drives off and disappears on its way out of the village. Bethia is left in THE DUST and stands alone in the quiet.

She listens to the EARLY MORNING BIRDS for a moment, sees some them FLASHING AND WHIRLING by, before she moves off.

EXT. BETHIA'S COTTAGE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia stands in front of the cottage. It stands dark and dormant and without welcome.

We hear the SOUND OF WAVES. Bethia turns her head to hear.

EXT. LULWORTH COVE - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia walks down the lane that leads down to the beach. When she gets near the water, she stops at the sight of -

- Tizard! Sitting on the beach, facing out toward the ocean. The wind has picked up and the water is choppy.

Bethia pauses before crashing down to the pebbles. Tizard leaps to his feet. They stand opposite each other.

BETHIA

Sammy!

TIZARD

(defensive)

I ain't done found 'er yet.

BETHIA

You dussen 'ave to.

Tizard frowns.

BETHIA (CONT'D)

She be dead. Not a mermaid.

Tizard looks like a dog that's been shown a card trick.

TIZARD

But - 'ee said -

BETHIA

My da' killed her!

Tizard looks down and sheepish.

TIZARD

No - No, he dussen. She did go in
the sea.

He starts to pace around, physicalising his story, circling
around Bethia, using more and more of the beach. As he
becomes more frantic, Bethia begins to realise something.

TIZARD (CONT'D)

(accelerando)

She came - down to the water and
she took her clothes off - I dussen
tell you this, but I was awake a
little bit, so - I did see her, and
she did stand *here* - and then she
did walk into the water, yes she
did, and then when she was out,
yonder, she went under, and I did
see a tail - a tail did come up and
she was *gone*! She - she did become
a mer - maid. She did swim away!

He ends up over the side of the beach near to the fishing
boat, smearing his hands down his coats and shifting from
side to side, darting his eyes around like prey in the open.

BETHIA

(stepping up to him)

You saw!

CU: Tizard's eyes - the darting condenses into a stare.

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK -

POV: We see Susannah naked emerging from the water and Elijah
standing over her on the beach.

CU: Tizard's wide eyes watching from the shadows of his prone
position under the shelter of the boat.

POV: Elijah is in the water, throttling Susannah, she flails
at him wildly.

CU: Tizard's eyes - he trembles and draws his limbs in tight
to his body.

POV: Susannah is under the surface, Elijah drowning her. The
her arms reach up above the water line, her legs thrashing,
turning the water white.

CU: Tizard's eyes - welling with tears.

INTERCUT WITH:

POV: Elijah's hands are still under the water, but Susannah's thrashing has reduced to the occasional twitching. After a moment, there is only stillness, silence. Elijah's hands release from under the water, breathing heavily.

After a moment, he wades around Susannah's corpse so that he can place his arms under her and drag her by the head and shoulders to the beach where he lays her body out.

He falls to the ground beside his daughter's body and weeps uncontrollably.

Cornered like a rat, he looks around for a moment, until he notices something. He double takes until he STARES RIGHT TOWARD TIZARD -

CU: Tizard's eyes SCREWED UP TIGHT, shaking.

POV: Elijah treads closer and closer so that his face is almost in close-up.

Elijah brings his face slowly to within INCHES of Elijah, who is struggling to conceal that he is awake...

ELIJAH
(whisper)
Sammy?

A moment before -- he SLAPS Tizard lightly on the face. No response.

Elijah seems satisfied and walks back to Susannah, leans down and hauls up her naked body into a fireman's lift, draped over his shoulder like a trapper's fur.

He takes a last look over at Tizard before marching off down the beach in the opposite direction. The moonlight flickers on Susannah's skin before father and daughter disappear into the blackness.

Elijah trembles and shivers in his hiding place.

END OF FLASHBACK -

Tizard can barely look Bethia in the eye.

BETHIA
You lied.

TIZARD
(retreating)
No, listen -

BETHIA
You lied!

TIZARD
It not true. She be out there! I
know it!

BETHIA
(screaming)
Stop lying!

TIZARD
I will find her for 'ee!

BETHIA
No - No -

He comes and grabs her by the head, her face to his.

TIZARD
(emphatic)
I will find her.

He lets her go and starts to run off into the water, Bethia tries to follow but she is chased back by the choppiness of the waves.

BETHIA
No! Sammy! Come back!

It is too late. Despite having WAVES CRASH DOWN UPON HIM, he moves off the beach and begins to swim out weakly but resolutely.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
Come back! Sammy!

He is now almost at the edge of the cove, HIS TINY HEAD BOBBING LIKE A CORK in the churning grey waves. Bethia falls to the beach, sobbing, as she watches him disappear out of view out of the cove.

The waves CRASH UPON THE BEACH.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - EARLY MORNING

Jane and Bethia ride silently opposite the Lord of the Manor IN HIS CARRIAGE on the road to Dorchester.

EXT. DORCHESTER GAOL - DAY

A RESTLESS BUT HAPPY CROWD gathers on the BANKS OF THE RIVER FROOME OPPOSITE THE NEWLY-BUILT GOAL. Outside the walls, on the bank opposite, A SCAFFOLD IS ERECTED with a noose clearly visible.

Wearing headscarves, Jane and Bethia trail behind the Lord of the Manor as they make their way behind the crowd.

Bethia is trudging along behind when HER EYES catch sight of A LONE FIGURE standing apart from the crowd - JAMES!

He peers over the heads of the crowd to the scaffold beyond, hands in his pockets.

Bethia dashes over to him. Jane turns her head to watch her go. Startled, James flinches causing Bethia to stop short of him, as if chasing a rabbit.

James stares at her for a while, as if weighing something in his mind. He looks up to see Jane looking on. Bethia braces herself for a quick escape if she needs to.

JAMES
(matter of fact)
I hear Tizard is dead.

Bethia nods. James looks into himself briefly.

JAMES (CONT'D)
I killed him.

BETHIA
No. I did.

JAMES
(at her)
May God forgive us then.

Pause. One of his hands emerges from his pocket.

BETHIA
I do think this belongs to 'ee.

He opens his palm to reveal THE DORSET BUTTON IN THE SHAPE OF A SHELL - the one that Bethia gave to Susannah.

Bethia looks with wonder at it, and edges forward to gently take it from his hand. She examines it carefully before looking to James for explanation.

JAMES

When she did turn from me, she gave
it me as keepsake. She said it be a
token of love.

BETHIA

It was.

She CLOSES THE BUTTON IN HER FIST.

A BOOING FROM THE CROWD distracts them both. Jane beckons
Bethia over and she looks at James again before darting over
to her mother.

The Lord emerges from the crowd and gestures to Jane.

LORD OF THE MANOR

It's time.

Jane nods and guides Bethia by her shoulders in the direction
of the Lord.

POV: Bethia walks with her mother behind the Lord, for whom
the crowd parts deferentially. As they make it to the edge of
the river bank, Bethia sees -

- In the distance, a PARTY OF PRISON GUARDS emerges from a
gate in the prison wall. Escorted behind them are THREE
PRISONERS, one of which is a harrowed Elijah, still blinking
and squinting in the grey morning light.

The crowd JEERS. Bethia arrives at the front and is
overstimulated by the uproar. Jane, standing behind, grabs
her shoulders to keep her daughter steady.

The noise makes it impossible to hear proceedings, but in
dumb show, we see a prison guard step out and read from a
bound journal to the line of prisoners at the scaffold.

Then, Elijah is led forward by a guard to the foot of THE
SCAFFOLD STEPS and made to climb onto the stage and finally
to a position behind the noose. Bethia watches wide-eyed.

LS: Elijah tearfully makes some kind of speech but the
JEERING OF THE CROWD is too loud to hear any of it.

The Lord of the Manor looks around at the baying mob and
bristles with disgust.

LORD OF THE MANOR (CONT'D)

(Sotto voce)

Good God!

Bethia is desperate to hear something but the crowd is wild. Finally, she bursts out of Jane's grip and darts forward.

BETHIA
(screaming)
Da! Da! Da!

The crowd, like some giant organism, become SLOWLY HUSHED to silence by the sight and sound of her screaming.

CUT TO:

CU: Elijah's face becomes aware of the crowd hush and his eyes go from quivering and darting around the noose in front, instead range to -

POV: Across the river, he can pick out the DISTANT TINY FIGURE OF BETHIA at the front of the crowd.

CU: Bethia stares back at him, tears rolling down.

BETHIA (CONT'D)
(beside herself)
Da!

Elijah looks back at her, fixing his gaze on her as the noose is drawn around his neck.

Jane stares down at Bethia, trying to keep something down before she is forced to stare across the river.

Bethia looks on as her father is manouvered into position above a trapdoor on the gallows.

CU: Elijah still staring across at Bethia, closes his eyes --

-- CLATTER of the trap! Elijah's head drops below the frame, leaving only TAUGHT ROPE.

There is a silence. All of the MANY FACES OF THE CROWD turn their eyes to train on Bethia to see how she might react.

Bethia watches as the distant body of her father is removed from the rope. The crowd are all looking to Bethia in her reaction.

Jane moves forward from the crowd and comes to stand by Bethia, placing a hand on her shoulder. Bethia looks up at her mother who returns her look without giving anything away.

Jane leads Bethia back through the crowd, who part way for them with a LITTLE RESPECTFUL MURMUR. The Lord of the Manor watches them go.

The DARK RIVER current flows on by, oblivious.

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - DAY

Bethia and Jane sit at the table sewing DORSET BUTTONS.

Bethia tries to focus on her work, but her eyes are drawn to her side as she glances to analyse her mother's expression, looking for some sign to stop or reflect.

CU: Jane's eyes focus on her work, indifferently.

Super close on THE NEEDLE AND THREAD as it crosses and weaves over the SPOKES of the button.

Bethia is unable, as before, to commune with her mother.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMON ROOM, BETHIA'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Bethia and Jane sit silently at the table eating dinner. Jane eats slowly and with measured servings. Bethia watches her mother under her brow as her spoon hovers near her mouth.

CUT TO:

LATER -- Jane sits in A CHAIR BY THE STOVE looking into the fire, Bethia apart from her looks out of THE FRONT WINDOW INTO THE LANE.

POV: THE TREES outside move gently in the wind.

JANE
(deadpan)
'Ee should get to bed.

Bethia turns to her, looking for some other sign. Seeing none, she nods silently and creeps past her mother to find a candle from the side. Lighting it wordlessly from the stove, she softly climbs the stairs.

Jane moves not a muscle.

INT. BETHIA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Bethia lies in bed in the darkness, eyes ablaze.

She listens as the FOOTSTEPS ON THE STAIRS signal her mother coming to bed. The CREAK AND THUMP of the other bedroom door as it closes leaves a deathly silence.

Bethia eyes blink, before she turns over to her side.

BEGINNING OF DREAM SEQUENCE:

INT. ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH - NIGHT

Bethia walks down the long aisle of the deserted nave toward the coffin that sits before the alter on its bier. The candles surrounding her FLICKER MENACINGLY in a draught.

As she nears the wooden box, she sees that the lid is off. Arriving at the side, the coffin is too high for her to see into.

She turns around to find a wooden chair from the pews and drags it clumsily, causing a GRINDING OF WOOD ON STONE.

Holding it in place, she looks down and sees that the floor is uneven beneath the chair, causing it to ROCK from leg to diagonally opposite leg.

She turns to the coffin and puts a foot on the seat.

CU: The leg of the chair, lifts and falls, BANGING on the stone beneath as it rocks.

Bethia steps fully up to stand on the chair before turning round slowly to see --

-- SUSANNAH'S BEATEN FACE, SANS EYES, SANS TEETH and ETCHED in RED SCARS AND GASHES --

CU: Bethia's face - terrified --

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. JANE'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The DOOR HANDLE RATTLES frenetically --

-- Jane bolts up in bed to hear BETHIA SCREAMING FROM BEHIND THE DOOR. She can't get in.

-- Jane darts out of her covers and goes to the handle --

-- Bethia flies in, and into Jane's arms wailing uncontrollably. Jane is forced to put her arms around her.

JANE
(with unfamiliarity)
Sssshhh! Sshhhhhh!

They rock back and forth in the darkness until Bethia's cries deform into quiet sobbing.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. JANE'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Bethia lies back in Jane's arms as THE SUNLIGHT COMES THROUGH THE WINDOW. Jane is turned away from Bethia looking out at the light, but her free hand strokes Bethia's hair gently.

BETHIA
I killed 'Nannah.

JANE
No.

BETHIA
Will I go to hell?

JANE
(with a sigh)
I don't believe in Hell.

Bethia doubletakes a little. This is a strange thing to hear.

BETHIA
Da' did.

JANE
(slowly without turning)
Your Da' thought himself a sinner because he came to me in the night, full with drinking, when I was but a maid, and got me with child.

Bethia stops breathing.

JANE (CONT'D)
My father cast me out of home for a whore and his father beat him till he did piss blood. They made us marry - in St Andrew's. We did make our vows in the church and 'Nannah was born some four month later. She did cry some - your Da' was just a boy. He carried his father's hands with him ... breaking stuff in the house, storming out to the Lion.

Bethia blinks and re-focuses intently on the story.

JANE (CONT'D)

He'd come home in his cups and
Susannah still be crying. He'd
rattle her some and then be to bed
before too much damage were done.
He'd rattle me sometime instead.

A moment of chill.

JANE (CONT'D)

Summers passed and the old parson
saw the man he'd become. He'd come
with his book of forgiveness.
Taught him to read, in part, though
he did mostly learn by hearing and
repeating. He wore a changed man.
Gave up on drinking. You wore born
in that light of Christ. He did
dote on you.

Bethia's tears well up.

JANE (CONT'D)

But he couldn't mend with your
sister. He but saw his own dark
deeds in her face, like the devil
holding up a mirror to him. I knew
what look he gave her. The same one
he gave me. When he still looked at
me. He saw his own shame.

Jane finally turns over. She and Bethia are nose to nose,
staring into each other's eyes.

JANE (CONT'D)

These men. Their tall tales;
gabbling at the bar, prattling in
their sermons, strumming and
ballads - it be all about them.
What they believe to be true.

A moment. Unblinking communion between them.

BETHIA

I told stories too.

JANE

'Ee did. We all tell 'em. Mostly to
ourselves, for no one else be
listening. But life be no story.
And it don't have any other ending
than the grave. And then ...

Bethia gulps. It's a lot to take in.

BETHIA
Nothing makes sense.

JANE
No. And it never will.

They continue to stare at each other for a moment before -

EXT. CLIFFS BETWEEN LULWORTH AND DURDLE DOOR - DAY

THE FUTURE:

A bright but breezy day. THE WIND WHIPS the LONG GRASS on the cliffs above the sea.

Jane emerges onto the plateau as she climbs from the unseen hill on the far side. Clearly older, her GREYING HAIR flies in the wind. She stops for a moment to recover, BREATHLESS and sore from the climb, but surprised by her weakness.

She looks behind her, and we OLDER BETHIA emerge from her climb, upright, poised, a BEAUTIFUL YOUNG WOMAN, who takes the arrival at the summit in her even stride. She carries a SMALL CLOTH BAG over her shoulder.

We hear her changed voice: assured, transformed, calm.

OLDER BETHIA
(v.o.)
I can only tell 'ee what I believe
to be true...

She sees her mother, struggling, and steps forward to take her arm, smiling benevolently.

EXT. TINY COVE - DAY

Jane and Bethia descend down A STEEP, NARROW PATH to a deserted cove sheltered by the tall cliffs above. The sea is protected and calm, and gently chops into A NATURAL ROCKY PLATFORM next to the water.

OLDER BETHIA
(v.o.)
And what I believes changes...
There are no things that do not
change...

CUT TO:

Jane and her sister sit on the ROCKS by the water. Bethia shares BREAD from her bag with Jane and they eat.

CU: Bethia's HAND rests by her side on the rock beneath.

OLDER BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

Even the ground beneath our feet
can fall away...

The WAVES clap into the ROCKY SHELF. We see the CURVES AND HOLES of thousands of years of erosion.

CUT TO:

LATER - Bethia stands opposite Jane and Jane begins to remove her clothes, beginning with her wool stockings.

OLDER BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

"When I was a child, I spake as a
child - "

She hands them to Jane who begins to gather a clutch of clothing in her arms as Bethia proceeds to remove her skirt, then underskirt.

OLDER BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

"I understood as a child, I thought
as a child - "

Jane watches as Bethia removes her the rest of her clothing and stands naked in front of her.

OLDER BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

"but when I became a man, I put
away childish things."

Jane looks as THE SUN BREAKS OUT AND SHINES on Bethia giving her even greater youthfulness and radiance. She manages a proud smile which Bethia returns.

JANE

Don't go too far.

OLDER BETHIA

(smiles)

Look out for me.

Jane nods - a promise. Bethia smiles again before moving toward the edge of the platform. Jane glances around at the surrounding cliffs, making sure they are alone.

Bethia stands on the edge, the BLUE WATERS OF THE COVE inviting her. She takes a breath before diving in -

EXT. UNDERWATER, OCEAN - MOMENTS LATER

Bethia pulls through the clear sunlit waters.

OLDER BETHIA

(v.o.)

"For now, we see through a glass,
darkly..."

CU: Bethia's eyes squint as they peer into the water.

POV: The view into the ocean gets darker and more opaque into the distance.

OLDER BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

"But then face to face..."

Bethia begins a swim to THE SURFACE SHIMMERING ABOVE HER -

OLDER BETHIA (CONT'D)

(v.o.)

"...now I know in part.."

EXT. TINY COVE - CONTINUOUS

Bethia breaks the surface, the sunlight sparkling off her wet skin and hair as it falls down her back.

OLDER BETHIA

(v.o.)

"but then shall I know even as also
I am known."

She wipes her eyes and looks to the shore. Jane looks back at her and raises a hand in a gentle wave.

Bethia raises a hand back before turning round to face -

POV: THE OPEN SEA - wide, bright and seemingly endless.

FADE TO BLACK.

END CREDITS.

THE END