

*The Servants exit.*

*Elizabeth enters in her wedding dress, with Clarice. We're in the master bedroom; there is a large bed. They can hear wedding bells in the distance.*

START

Clarice Listen – you can still hear the bells ringing, over the water.

Elizabeth So you can.

*They listen for a moment.*

Clarice Many congratulations, Mistress. It was a splendid day.

Elizabeth Thank you. Please get me ready for bed.

Clarice Yes, Mistress.

*Clarice proceeds to help her undress.*

Elizabeth I want to look beautiful.

Clarice Yes, Mistress.

Elizabeth Perhaps then he'll –

Clarice I'm sure he will.

*Elizabeth breaks down and sobs.*

Elizabeth He never touches me! He never comes near! He barely spoke to me after the service!

Clarice Well, he has always been peculiar.

Elizabeth But what have I done wrong, Clarice?

Clarice You've done nothing, Mistress. Men, you know – they're as nervous as we are on their wedding night. A lot of them have no experience whatever.

Elizabeth I'm not nervous!

Clarice I know you're not, Mistress. And yet you don't

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know what to expect, do you? None of us do, first time. It can come as quite a shock. Here we are, Mistress – you'll look as pretty as a picture.

*Clarice helps her into a long nightgown, and unpins her hair.*

Some ladies never get used to it at all, to be perfectly honest. Oh, but I'm sure you will.

Elizabeth Where is he?

Clarice He'll be along shortly, Mistress. You wait and see. Having a glass or two, probably, if he's anything like my husband. He'd put a bag on my head if he could. Come along now, let's pop you into bed.

Elizabeth First I must pray. – That's all.

Clarice Goodnight, Mistress. God bless.

*Clarice curtsies and exits. Elizabeth kneels by her bed and prays. Victor enters. He has a pistol in each hand and a wild look on his face. After him come two Servants armed with muskets.*

Elizabeth Victor!

Victor Report!

Servant 1 We patrol the terrace and the roof.

Servant 2 We have men down at the lake.

Victor Good. Wait for me outside. I'll join you presently.

*The Servants exit. Victor hastily drinks a glass of spirits. Elizabeth is considerably alarmed.*

Elizabeth Victor, what is going on?

Victor The house is secured. There are guards at every door.