

backwater out in the slums. Happiness is based on who you are and what you have.

MAEVE (*suddenly standing*). You know nothing –

Silence. A stand-off. CAROLYN and MAEVE refuse to see eye to eye. The others look on.

MISS BLAKE. Miss Sullivan?

MAEVE. You know nothing about it. We're scientists, aren't we? We want to be scientists. Give us a bucket of water and we will work out the laws of gravity. That costs nothing. And that is happiness. 'The mind, like its creator, is free,' John Clare.

MISS BLAKE. Well. Miss Addison?

Silence. She has no comeback.

CAROLYN. Alright.

MISS BLAKE. You know you're leagues behind the men.

Pause. MISS BLAKE takes them all in.

TESS. They've got years of schooling on us.

MISS BLAKE. But you're bright. And you're here. We're campaigning to win you the right to graduate. There's to be a vote.

CELIA. A vote?

MISS BLAKE. If Mrs Welsh can persuade the Senate, yes. They say you don't have the capacity to be scholars. So read everything. Learn everything. Know the philosophers, and then think for yourselves. For Wednesday I want three thousand words on the comparative merits of Kant's categorical imperative versus Pluralistic Deontology. And three thousand on an alternative theory.

TESS. Whose theory, ma'am?

MISS BLAKE. Your own. Now, get to a library. You know the men won't marry you if you choose knowledge. (*Pause.*) And I won't lecture you... if you don't.

Scene Four

The Wandering Womb

The young MEN arrive in a large public lecture hall and make their way to their seats.

LLOYD. I tell you, you could see the bones in her hand, plain as day.

EDWARDS. Her rings and the bones, but not an ounce of flesh.

HOLMES. Extraordinary.

EDWARDS. They're calling them X-rays until they think of a proper name.

HOLMES. Let me see, then.

LLOYD. Come on, Edwards.

EDWARDS. I haven't got them!

LLOYD. He has.

HOLMES. You're hiding them! He's going to claim it's his discovery!

LLOYD. Hand them over.

EDWARDS. I told you, I haven't got them!

HOLMES. Right. Search him. You take the legs.

LLOYD and HOLMES go for EDWARDS. *They might tip him upside down.*

LLOYD. They're down his trousers.

HOLMES. Get them off!

EDWARDS. Get off me, get off me! There's girls coming, look!

The WOMEN arrive, led by their chaperone, MISS BOTT, who escorts them to the front row and then retreats to a seat at the side, from which she proceeds to knit loudly. The MEN put EDWARDS down.

HOLMES. Well, well.

CAROLYN. That's not true, ma'am.

MISS BLAKE. Why not?

CAROLYN. We learn science through the arts, don't we? We study reason and logic when we read Galileo and Copernicus.

MISS BLAKE. You're still arguing that science is the highest form of knowledge.

TESS. But what if it is, ma'am?

MISS BLAKE. Go on.

TESS. Well, science improves our lives in practical ways which the arts cannot.

MISS BLAKE. Well put. Now if that's really your opinion, get out.

TESS. Why?

MISS BLAKE. Unless you can argue my position.

TESS. But what if I don't agree with it?

MISS BLAKE. A fine theorist can argue either side of the debate. Why might the arts be superior to natural science? Give me a contemporary thinker.

CAROLYN. Arnold, ma'am.

MISS BLAKE. Good God, Miss Addison, you've discovered the library!

CAROLYN. Arnold said that science doesn't address the bigger questions. What it means to be human. What intellect is, what beauty is.

TESS. We can't advance as a nation if we live out of history books.

CAROLYN. But literature elevates us beyond science. Science is elementary. What a body is, how it functions. It doesn't address why it exists. Arts asks us more. What does it mean to be? What is truth? What is love?

CELIA. Science is all about seeking truth, but in reality, not in fanciful ideas.

CAROLYN. Love isn't fanciful. It can be felt, experienced.

Voices begin to be raised a little.

CELIA. But it's not real. It's not tangible.

TESS. Lovers are tangible.

MISS BLAKE (*warning her jovially*). Miss Moffat.

TESS. Come on. If your lover had the pox, you'd rather a doctor treat him than an artist drown him with poetry.

CAROLYN. How do you know what my lover wants?

CELIA. Tess is right. Science can save lives.

TESS. And arts can't.

CAROLYN. But if your lover was dying, and there was nothing in the world but machinery – if there was nothing to elate him, if the world was barren of poetry and music, then there'd be little reason to revive him. It's the arts that make his life worth sustaining.

MISS BLAKE. Well said, Miss Addison.

CAROLYN. Well, I don't believe it entirely. I'm still going to be a doctor.

MAIVE (*in a sudden outburst*). We're all missing the point.

Pause.

MISS BLAKE (*surprised*). Miss Sullivan?

MAIVE. All the great scientists, Copernicus, Galileo, they made their discoveries because they had imagination. They saw more than what was in front of them; they thought like artists! They dreamed. And painters, great painters, treat their art like a science. Van Gogh did countless experiments with tone to work out the effects of darkness and light. They're Renaissance men. Proper thinkers. That's what progress needs. The fellows out there, building the chapel – they measure the timber so the vaults can bear weight – but without the stories in the stained glass – well, then it would be no more than a barn.

BILLY. What?

MAEVE. This is my home.

BILLY. But what about us?

TESS. This is her home.

BILLY. What would you know?

MRS WELSH. We understand –

BILLY. How could you understand? We don't have nothing.
The girls won't survive, miss!

MAEVE. I can't do it, Billy.

BILLY. You have to. Maeve? Maeve! (To MRS WELSH.) Tell her. Tell her she has to come home. They're her sisters. Your sisters, Maeve. We won't survive!

MRS WELSH. Maeve, listen / to me.

MAEVE. I can't. I can't go back.

BILLY. You have to! Tell her she has to, miss. You can't just... (Beat.) Is that it? You're just going to... (Beat.) You're like he was.

MAEVE. I'm nothing like he was.

BILLY. You're just like him. Dear God, Maeve. I can't even look at you.

He leaves. There is a long pause.

MAEVE. I am sorry, ma'am. I didn't know...

MRS WELSH. You weren't to know.

MAEVE. Thank you for sending him away.

MRS WELSH. Miss Sullivan. I'm afraid you'll need to pack your bags.

MAEVE. Ma'am?!

MRS WELSH. You must go to your room and pack.

TESS. You can't.

CELIA. You can't do that!

MISS BLAKE. Mrs Welsh! Please don't be rash.

MRS WELSH. You have brothers and sisters you are responsible for.

MAEVE. I didn't bear them. I didn't choose them.

MRS WELSH. They need a mother.

MAEVE. But this is who I am! You gave me this chance, you've shown me the world! I never knew what I wanted before, before I came here, and now I've found it, I've seen what the world is, I'm learning, I've learnt who I am. Don't take that away, please!

MISS BLAKE. Mrs Welsh –

MAEVE. I'd rather kill myself. I'll throw myself under the train.

MRS WELSH. Please don't make this any more difficult than it needs to be.

MAEVE. It's cos of where I'm from, isn't it? Cos I'm not like them. Cos I needed help.

MRS WELSH. You know perfectly well that's not true.

MAEVE. You only want respectable girls from respectable families. Not slummers' drudge like me.

MRS WELSH. Don't you dare suggest that.

MAEVE. But it's my life, Mrs Welsh! I'm going to be a teacher. And I understand people – I've lived. (Silence.) Please, this is my only chance.

MISS BLAKE. Mrs Welsh, can't we at least talk about this?

Silence. MRS WELSH looks round at them all.

MRS WELSH. Ladies, don't you have work to do? Miss Sullivan, I'm afraid you'll be leaving us in the morning.

The WOMEN all exit, including MAEVE. TESS is hugely upset and walks into her room, where we see her begin to write. This continues under the next scene.