

She giggles.

Listen, I'm sorry I asked you here. I've been paralysed with guilt.

TESS. It's alright.

An owl screeches.

RALPH. It's just a barn owl.

TESS. 'Tyto alba alba.'

RALPH. Oh, so you're a Latin scholar?

TESS. No. I'm an astrophysicist.

RALPH. Well! Me too. Venus is bright tonight.

TESS. Striking, isn't she?

RALPH. Yes, she is. (*A little moment.*) Listen, I don't even know your name.

TESS. Tess Moffat.

RALPH. Well, Miss Moffat, it's a pleasure to meet you properly.

TESS. You too.

RALPH. Ralph Mayhew. 'Esquire.'

They shake hands rather formally. Beat.

Well, this is rather unconventional, isn't it. I probably should have asked you to a clarinet concert, not to some spooky orchard.

TESS. It is a bit.

RALPH. Isn't it! (*Ghostily.*) Woooo! Look, please forgive me, I hope you don't mind; I thought I might – read you something.

TESS. Oh. Here?

RALPH. Yes. But I'm not very literary, so it might be disastrous.

TESS. I doubt that.

RALPH. It's a poem. But it's... actually, maybe I shouldn't.

TESS. No, please do.

He takes a slip of paper out, looks at it.

RALPH. I really don't know –

TESS. Go on.

RALPH. Alright. It's a love poem.

TESS. Oh.

RALPH. It's called *A Lady Who is Fair*.

TESS. Right.

RALPH.

*Provedi, saggio, ad esta visione,
e per mercé ne trai vera sentenza.*

*Dico: una donna di bella fazone,
di cu' el meo cor gradir molto s'agenzia.
mi fe' d'una ghirlanda donagione,
verde, fronzuta, con bella accoglienza.*

Pause.

TESS. Well that was –

RALPH. That's not the end.

TESS. Oh. Right.

RALPH.

*Appresso mi trovai per vestigione
camicia di suo dosso, a mia parvenza.
Allor di tanto, amico, mi francai che
dolcemente presila abbracciare.*

Pause.

That's the end.

TESS. Well! Well. That was quite beautiful. Thank you. What does it mean?

RALPH. I have no idea. I'm a scientist. Maybe next time I'll show you an experiment.

TESS. I should like that.

RALPH. Or I could write you a paper on Kepler.

TESS. How do you know I like Kepler?

RALPH. Your book, in the library.

TESS. So you knew I was an astronomer!

RALPH. I was impressed.

TESS. You don't think it's unfeminine?

RALPH. Anyone who can make head or tail of Kepler deserves a medal in my book. I'm using my copy as a doorstop. I think you being here – ladies studying – well, it's grand.

TESS. We don't hear that very often.

He looks at her fondly, then takes a risk.

RALPH. Miss Moffat, may I kiss your hand?

TESS *extends her hand. He takes it and kisses it politely. He holds on to it for just a second.*

You're getting cold. You mustn't stay out any longer.

TESS. Thank you for your unusual poem. May I keep it?

RALPH. They say it's the most beautiful love poem ever written.

TESS. I wonder what Shakespeare would say to that?

RALPH. He'd probably pinch it. Maybe you should keep it under your hat.

TESS. I'll do just that.

She loosens her hat and takes it off. He places the poem on her head carefully, holding it there for a second as she puts her hat back on. They look at each other for a moment.

RALPH. So, goodnight, Miss Moffat.

TESS. Goodnight.

She walks back towards the door. He begins to walk away.

Wait! How will I know...?

RALPH. I'll leave you a sign. Look out for it. Goodnight, sweet mistress!

TESS. Goodnight.

She watches him until he is out of sight. Then she has a little moment of elation before she exits.

Scene Ten

The Merits of Moral Science

The WOMEN are in their moral science class with MISS BLAKE, who is full of gusto.

MISS BLAKE. So, you were barred from another lecture, I hear.

CAROLYN. We were turned away at the door.

MISS BLAKE. Again? Well, this is becoming quite a page-turner. You know, it makes me wonder if there's any point teaching you at all. Especially moral science. You're dismissed. (*Packs to go.*)

CAROLYN. What?

MISS BLAKE. Free to go.

TESS. Miss Blake!

CELIA. You can't just leave us!

MISS BLAKE. Why not? The world hurtles forward. What's the point of the arts when technology evidently needs you. Go on. I'm wasting your time. Moral science? Pah! And classics, literature, music – worthless. Nothing compared to science and mathematics. We philosophers and poets have nothing to offer you.