

FOR THOSE IN PERIL

A Chamber Opera in Two Parts (an intermission may be inserted after Scene 9 if desired)

Libretto by Francis L. Lynch & Raymond Humphreys

from original material by the authors and from additional sources

Music by Francis L. Lynch

Story suggested by Paul Ryder

Instrumentation: five players (flute, clarinet, violin, viola, and cello)

CAST

Narrator	Soprano
Gwendolyn Howell, wife of Howell	Soprano
Madeleine Griffith, wife of Griffith	Mezzo-soprano
Thomas Howell, lighthouse keeper	Tenor
Henry Whiteside, lighthouse architect	Tenor
Thomas Griffith, lighthouse keeper	Baritone
Rhys Williams, lighthouse service officer	Bass-baritone

(Note: one singer may sing both tenor roles.)

(The action takes place in three separate settings, which may be divisions of a larger stage or may be denoted by simple set changes. The first [designated LH] is the interior of the living quarters of a nineteenth century lighthouse, with a small table and chair, and a cast iron wood stove; on the back wall of the lighthouse interior is a small square window, in front of which is a cot. On one side of the interior wall a door [initially closed] opens onto a small platform where a ladder leads up out of sight. Downstage on the opposite side is an entrance used to indicate access from below, as the living quarters are some considerable distance above the base of the lighthouse structure. The second setting [designated DR] is used only in Part One: a Georgian [i.e., early 1800's] lady's drawing room with writing desk and lamp. The third setting [designated CH] is used only in Part Two: a portion of the interior of a small chapel with a prie-dieu and pews or chairs. In addition, some scenes take place downstage [designated DS] of the set, including the prologue and other scenes in which the narrator appears.)

PART ONE

PROLOGUE (DS): The Morning and the Evening Star (opening verses for narrator adapted from "Even-Star" by Richard Garnett)

(After a brief instrumental prelude, the narrator enters downstage. Alternatively, if the scenery permits, she can be lit far upstage and above as she descends and proceeds downstage.)

Narrator: I am the morning and the evening star;
I watch the world in wonder from afar.
First-born and final relic of the night,
I dwell aloof in dim immensity;
The grey sky sparkles with my fairy light;
I mix among the dancers of the sea;
Yet stoop not from the throne I must retain
High o'er the silver sources of the rain.
Vicissitude I know not, nor can know,
Yet much discern strewed everywhere around;
The ever-stirring race of men below
Much do I watch, and wish I were not bound
The chainless captive of this lonely spot,

For Those in Peril

Where light-winged Mutability is not.
I see great cities rise, and fall to war,
And slowly crumble into dust again;
And roaring billows preying on the shore;
And virgin isles ascending from the main;
The passing wave of the perpetual river;
And frosty nights when men and women shiver.
The upturned eyes of many a mortal maid
Glass me in gathering tears, soon kissed away;
Then walks she for a space, and then is laid
Swelling the bosom of the quiet clay.
I muse what this all-kindling Love may be,
And what this Death that never comes to me.

Now comes the dawn to shed its meager light
On two whose destiny awaits at sea;
And two who must wait, helpless at their plight,
Not knowing what their loved ones' fate shall be.
Watch with me now, as fades the shadowed night,
And pray for those in peril on the sea.

(Exit narrator.)

SCENE 1 (DS & LH): Departure and Arrival of the Keepers

(After a brief instrumental interlude, Griffith and Madeleine enter. Griffith wears a cloak and carries a sack. He sets this down and looks about him.)

Griffith: I was told to meet Captain Williams here, on the dock.
But I do not yet see him...

Madeleine: *(clinging to Griffith)* Oh Thomas dear, why must you go?
You know that I will miss you so!

Griffith: I only wish that I could stay.
But with my debts, I need this pay.
Last year I took some bad advice,
And now I have to pay the price.

Oh, dear Lord. Is that Howell?

(Howell and Gwendolyn enter on the opposite side of the stage.)

Howell: Farewell, my dear wife. I bid you pray for me.

Gwendolyn: Please do not go— I have the most awful feeling that I may never see you again.

Howell: What nonsense! Be on your way, and take care of our home in my absence.

(He turns away dismissively, sees Griffith and takes a few steps toward him. Gwendolyn watches him but does not leave the stage.)

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Mr. Griffith.

Griffith: Mr. Howell.

Howell: So we are to be companions at the lighthouse.
I hope that you have seen the error of your ways.

Griffith: It is I who hope that you have seen your error.

(Williams enters and strides up to the men.)

Williams: Howell? Griffith? Come with me.

Griffith & Howell: Aye, Captain Williams.

(Griffith turns to Madeleine after gesturing to Williams to wait a moment.)

Griffith: Good-bye, my dear wife. I will be back before you even know it.

Madeleine: Good-bye, my dear husband.

(Williams, Griffith, and Howell exit. Madeleine comes over to Gwendolyn and takes her hands.)

Madeleine: I want you to know that you can count me as a friend.

Gwendolyn: We can share our worries and our fears.

Both: We must be strong, and wait and pray;
And think of them, while they're away—
Take comfort knowing that they are
Still near and yet so very far.
We can but pray that they shall be
Safe from all perils of the sea.

(They exit and the lights go down for a musical interlude.)

(The lights come up on the lighthouse interior. Williams, Griffith, and Howell enter from the door leading to the platform. Howell closes the door behind him. Williams makes a gesture indicating the lighthouse as a whole.)

Williams: That's the lot, then, me lads.
Now you know the lay of the land, so to speak.
You've three months supplies;
your duties are simple: just keep the lamps lit at all times.
So: any questions?

Griffith: *(after an uncomfortable glance at Howell)* So do the lamps burn even in the day?

Howell: But of course, as any fool who looks from shore can see!

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Williams: *(with a sharp glance at Howell)* Yes, the lamps are an aid to navigation at all hours.

Griffith: How then are our duties divided up?

Howell: *(before Williams can reply)* Well, how many are we? And how many hours in a day? What would you think?

Williams: *(with a cautionary gesture to Howell)* One man is on duty half the day, from six in the morning to six in the evening, the other on duty for the other twelve hours.

Howell: I believe I should be the one on duty during the day.

Griffith: *(flaring up)* I have no interest in your beliefs— as you know.

Howell: *(with a step toward Griffith)* That's because your own beliefs are so wrong.

Williams: *(stepping between them)* Hold, both of you! Is there some history between you?

Griffith: *(turning and walking away)* This one fancies himself a wandering preacher who spreads his Methodist nonsense wherever he goes.

Howell: *(also turning away)* He calls himself "Independent" but that only means he rejects rightful authority.

Williams: *(rolling his eyes)* I think it would be best to avoid the subject of religion while you are stationed here. The regulations call for the keepers to alternate their duty shifts every fortnight. If Howell wishes to take the first stretch of day duties— *(looks at Griffith questioningly, who makes a dismissive wave without turning around)* Very well, then. Griffith shall move to the day shift in two weeks. Any other questions?

(The other two men remain silent, facing away from each other.)

Then I just have one last piece of advice.
(Trio)
Make an effort to be kind and work together;
Or you'll find this tour of duty heavy weather.

Griffith: I don't care to be berated by this preacher;
In all matters of my faith I need no teacher.

Howell: It is plain to see this man lacks comprehension;
To the truth he never pays the least attention.

(End Trio)

Williams: Then I leave you to your duties. I shall return in three months to bring your relief.
God be with you both. *(aside)* (I pray He will keep you from killing each other.)

(Exit Williams via the downstage entrance.)

SCENE 2 (DR): Madeleine's First Letter

For Those in Peril

(Lights come up on Madeleine seated at her desk, finishing a letter. She stands to sing.)

Madeleine: My husband, I write you this letter;
Although I should surely know better.
I know it shall never be sent,
And yet I am somehow content
To put into words what I feel;
This letter makes you seem more real.
I pray that you shall be consoled
By warm thoughts of me when you're cold.
The lighthouse shall now be your home;
No more in our fields will you roam.

Now that you're gone, we are so far apart;
I feel as if there's a hole in my heart.

I'll think of you each passing hour,
Remote from the world in your tower,
And tending the light that shall save
Lost sailors from their wat'ry grave.
I'll wait for you here on the shore,
Rememb'ring the days from before.
How lonely our cottage now seems—
Perhaps we shall meet in our dreams.

SCENE 3 (DS): The Night Watch (adapted from "The Light-Keeper" by Robert Louis Stevenson)

(Narrator enters downstage and sings while the seated Griffith makes entries in the logbook.)

Narrator: As the evening slowly gathers
Around the lonely tower,
And the long night falls,
And the light shines on in the cold and the darkness,
Quiet and still at his desk,
The Lonely Light-Keeper
Holds his vigil.

Lured from far,
The bewildered seagull beats
Dully against the lantern;
Yet he stirs not, lifts not his head
From the desk where he reads,
Lifts not his eyes to see
The chill blind circle of night
Watching him through the panes.
This is his country's guardian,
The outmost sentry of peace,
This is the man
Who gives up what is lovely in living
For the means to live.

For Those in Peril

Poetry cunningly guilds
The life of the Light-Keeper,
Held on high in the blackness
In the burning kernel of night,
The seaman sees and blesses him,
The Poet, deep in a sonnet,
Numbers his inky fingers
Fitly to praise him.
Only we behold him,
Sitting, patient and stolid,
Martyr to a salary.

SCENE 4 (DR): Madeleine's Second Letter

(As before, she is seated at her writing desk to finish the letter, then stands to sing.)

Madeleine: Each Sunday evening belongs to you;
I set aside this time each week
To bring your memory into view
And gaze into your eyes and speak.

On these frail pages I pour my love;
With words I weave a tapestry
And draw the one I am dreaming of—
My distant guardian of the sea.

Now from the people who hold you so dear,
I bring you news of the family here.
Though they would never admit it, I know,
All of the children are missing you so.
Emily prays for you every night;
Every child's proud of you tending the light.

Down in the village, life's still much the same.
All that I speak with will mention your name,
Wishing for your sake the weather stays fair,
Glad that they know of your service out there.
I can't believe how time crawls now you're gone—
Sometimes I don't know if I can keep on.

But when I think of you, out to sea,
My woes don't seem so much to bear;
I know that soon you'll come back to me
And once again our life we'll share.

So now I must put myself to bed,
And bid adieu to this long day;
But ere I lay down my weary head,
For you I kneel and softly pray:

(from the Book of Common Prayer)

For Those in Peril

Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night,
And give thine angels charge over those who sleep.
Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary,
Bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous;
And all for thy love's sake. Amen.

SCENE 5 (LH): The First Incident

(Griffith is seated at the table, reading his bible. Abruptly Howell enters from the platform door.)

Howell: What have you done with my bible?

Griffith: Your bible?

Howell: It is not in its proper place by my cot. You must have taken it.

Griffith: Why would I take your bible? As you can see, I have one of my own.

Howell: You are trying to make things difficult for me. As if your mere presence were not enough of a trial.

Griffith: Well, have you looked for it? Most likely you have simply mislaid it.

Howell: Where have you hidden it?

Griffith: Do you remember where you were when you last read your bible?

Howell: I read it every evening before bed, of course.

Griffith: But did I not see you reading it this morning? When you returned from your walk outside? *(walks over to the wall beneath the window.)* Yes, here it is. You must have left it here. *(holds bible out to Howell.)*

Howell: *(seizing the bible roughly from Griffith's grasp)* I don't recall that I left it there. You must have taken it from my bedside.

Griffith: That isn't true. Why do you blame me without reason?

Howell: In the future, keep your hands off my possessions.

Griffith: I have touched nothing of yours except this bible, and only to hand it to you just now.

(They turn away from each other to sing the following duet. Howell is angry and animated, Griffith weary and resigned.)

Why does he torment me so?
Why can't he just let it go?
Once we could call ourselves friends—
Why can't he now make amends?
Set all our difference aside?
Shake hands and swallow his pride?

For Those in Peril

How did this state come to be?
Why does he persecute me?

(Griffith stands and crosses to sit on the cot. Howell seizes his vacated chair and sits down aggressively.)

SCENE 6 (DR): Madeleine's Third Letter

(As before, she is seated at her writing desk to finish the letter, then stands to sing.)

Madeleine: This night a soft, warm breeze bestirs
My curtains in the pale moonlight;
This echo of the summer past
Is precious now as days grow short.
Too soon the winter winds will roar,
And shuttered shall our windows be
Against the chill that stings our eyes
And grays the world with frost and ice.

And now, my love, I think of you,
Atop your fragile tower of stone.
When wind and wave come raging in,
Will you be safe amid the storms?
To God I send my fervent prayers
That you from danger might be saved,
And when your tour of duty ends,
I once again shall hold you close.

But for the moment let us take
This pleasant weather as a gift
That we can quietly enjoy.
What time shall bring we cannot know;
For now we can but rest and wait
To see what lies in store for us.
And so I send you all my love;
Good night, dear heart, I miss you so.

SCENE 7 (LH): The Second Incident

(Griffith is seated at the table, arms clasped behind his head, deep in thought. After a moment he leans forward and begins to sing softly, gradually becoming louder as he sings.)

Griffith: 'Twas at the Longstone Lighthouse,
There dwelt an English maid,
Pure as the air around her,
Of danger ne'er afraid,
One morning just at daybreak,
A storm-tossed crew she spied,
And though to try seemed madness,
"I'll save the crew," she cried.

(chorus) And she pulled away o'er the rolling sea,

For Those in Peril

Over the waters blue.
“Help, help!” she could hear the hopeless cry
Of the men of the shipwrecked crew.
But Grace had a fearless English heart,
As the raging storm she braved.
And she pulled away o’er the dashing spray,
And the stranded crew she saved.

(Howell again bursts in from the platform door.)

Howell: You’re no better a singer than you are a churchman. Listen:

They to the rocks were clinging,
A crew of nine all told,
Between them and the lighthouse
The seas like mountains rolled.
Cried Grace, “Come help me, father,
To launch the boat,” said she.
“’Tis madness,” cried her father,
“To face that raging sea.”

(joined by Griffith for the chorus)

G & H: One murmured prayer, “Heav’n, guard us!”
And then they were afloat.
Between them and destruction,
The planks of that frail boat.
Up spoke the maiden’s father:
“Return, or doomed are we!”
But up spoke brave Grace Darling:
“Alone I’ll brave the sea!”

(chorus)

They bravely rode the billows
And reached the rock at length,
And saved those storm-tossed sailors,
In heaven alone their strength.
Go tell the wide world over
What British pluck can do,
And sing of brave Grace Darling
Who nobly saved that crew.

(chorus)

(At the conclusion of the song, the singers look at each other.)

Griffith: *(with a quiet smile)* Well, we may be novices at lightkeeping, but at least we know the ballad of Grace Darling.

Howell: *(turning away)* In the future, spare me your bad singing.

(Shaking his head, Griffith crosses to the platform door, then turns for a final word.)

For Those in Peril

Griffith: Only if you promise to spare me yours.

(Starts to open the door to exit.)

Howell: *(quickly, before Griffith can exit)* Have you noticed the seabirds?

Griffith: *(stopping and turning)* What do you mean?

Howell: They know what's coming — heavy weather. I hope the farmers can bring in the harvest before the storm arrives.

Griffith: *(opening the door and looking out)* All seems calm enough for now.

Howell: Yes, we've had it easy so far. But mark my words. There are rough times ahead.

Griffith: *(sotto voce, as he steps through the door)* Don't I know it.

SCENE 8 (DS): The Coming Storm (adapted from "A Midnight Harvest" by Rosamund Marriott Watson)

(Narrator comes downstage to sing while the lights are down on the lighthouse set.)

Narrator: The white, white gulls wheel inland,
The breakers rake and grind;
The shagging clouds go swiftly
With a shattering gale behind.
What are the white gulls crying
Above the ripened corn?
"O, harvest will be over
Before the morrow's morn:
No need to whet the sickle,
No need to bring the wain,
The storm shall reap on the cliff-side steep,
And the west wind thresh the grain."

The white, white gulls whirl gaily,
They keep a merry coil,
But the farmer's heart is heavy
For all his months of toil:
He hears the white gulls' chorus,
Their cries of joyous scorn:
"O, harvest will be over
Or ever comes the morn:
Now go you to your bed, Farmer,
Lie down and take your ease;
The wind shall reap while you rest and sleep,
And the storm shall scour the leas."

The white, white foam flies upward,
The black rocks show their teeth,
Dark frowns the towering headland,
They grin and gird beneath;

For Those in Peril

What are the wild gulls crying,
Far up the valleys grey?
“Hey for the midnight harvest,
The merry breakers’ play!
There’ll be harvest out at sea, Farmer,
And harvest here on land:
There’ll be rare ripe grain for the hungry main,
And drowned folk for the strand.”

SCENE 9 (LH): The Third Incident

(The lights come up on Howell, seated at the table, spooning gruel from a bowl into his mouth. From his actions and expression, it is plain that he is not enjoying the meal.)

Howell: Dear God, this is wretched stuff!

(The platform door opens and Griffith enters, wearing an oilcloth cloak that is dripping.)

Griffith: You were right about the storm. It’s here, and we must keep the lamps burning more brightly than ever.

Howell: *(leaping to his feet)* This porridge is disgusting! Evidently you don’t know the least thing about cooking.

Griffith: *(heaving a sigh as he removes and hangs up his cloak)* You shouldn’t be so angry all the time. It can’t be good for your heart.

Howell: *(angrily)* It’s not my heart I’m worried about, it’s my stomach! This gruel is overcooked and flavorless. I wouldn’t feed it to swine.

Griffith: If you haven’t noticed, our larder here in the lighthouse is rather limited.

Howell: As for the rest of your meals — bah! A child could do better. You have no sense of how to use what we have. There are spices, you know— more than just salt!

Griffith: I didn’t know that you were such a gourmet. I’m sorry if my cooking disappoints you.

Howell: *(becoming more agitated)* It’s all part of your plan to make life miserable for me here!

Griffith: *(becoming angry himself)* You make life miserable for yourself! I have made every effort to be considerate of all of your demands, but there is a limit to what I can do.

Howell: Quite the contrary— there seems to be no limit to what you will do to anger me!

Griffith: But why are you so angry all the time? Is everything all right with you and your wife?

Howell: *(furiously)* How dare you! You leave my wife out of this. We are quite happy together.

Griffith: But surely you are missing her. Perhaps that is why you are so unhappy.

Howell: The only reason I am so unhappy is because you have hounded me so!

For Those in Peril

Perhaps you need to be taught a lesson! Aaahh....

(Howell suddenly charges at Griffith, who steps aside in surprise. Howell cries out, clutching his chest, and falls to the floor.)

Griffith: Thomas! Are you all right?

(Griffith kneels and reaches out to shake Howell's shoulders. There is no response.)

Griffith: Dear God, Thomas. What are you playing at?

(Howell is perfectly still, his eyes open and staring. Griffith staggers to his feet and fetches a hand mirror from the wall above the cot, then holds it under Howell's nose.)

Griffith: Oh my Lord, he's not breathing!

(He stands and stares down in horror at Howell's body.)

! Thomas, Thomas — you can't be dead! Never did I wish this!
What shall I do? What shall I do? *(trying to calm himself)*
I know — Williams told us that we can signal distress with a white flag from the gallery below the light. I will set out the signal and hope that some passing vessel will see it and come to my aid.

(He rummages among a pile of goods in one corner, finds a strip of white cloth, and goes out onto the platform. The music continues while he is away for a few minutes. He returns, again with dripping cloak.)

The storm begins to rage in earnest. Who knows how long it will be before a ship sees the signal and is able to respond? Certainly no boat can land upon this rock in these terrible winds!

(He staggers to the table and sits down, staring at the body on the floor.)

Oh, Thomas, may God have mercy on your soul. I pray that you may rest in peace.

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

PART TWO

SCENE 10 (CH): Gwendolyn's Prayer

(In the chapel, Gwendolyn kneels at the prie-dieu, then stands to sing with anxious pleading.)

Gwendolyn: My husband, dearest Thomas, I do pray that you are well.
Last night I came awake in darkness, filled with sudden dread,
As if I sensed the distant echoes of a tolling bell.
I feared within my heart of hearts that you might now be dead.

Oh, why did you decide to go and stay in that far tower?
I need you now to be with me in this our time of fear.
The storm grows ever fiercer with each slowly passing hour;

For Those in Peril

Oh, how I wish that you could be with me as I wait here.

My husband, dearest Thomas, I do pray that you are well.
I wish that I could still these fears that fill my anxious heart.
What fate you may have suffered, nought but time alone will tell.
I hope that we will never be again so far apart.

SCENE 11 (LH): Griffith's First Letter

(Griffith is seated at the table, writing a letter. He stands and peers out the window, shakes his head.)

Griffith: The storm shows no sign of relenting; if anything, it grows stronger.

(He reads from the letter.)

My Beloved Wife,
Strange it may be to relate that this is the first letter
I have penned to you in all the years of our marriage.
Some might call it strange for me to be writing this at all,
when there can be no hope of you reading the letter until I am
relieved from my duty one month from today. But it gives me
a few crumbs of comfort to know you will eventually see my
words. I will surely need anything falling from the Good Lord's
table before this month has passed. Last night my friend— I do
call him my friend before the Lord— Thomas Howell, died.
His passing was rapid, and I have not the medical knowledge
to say what ailed him. Now I fear to be left alone without him
for so long. The thing that claimed poor Thomas, be it sickness
or Demon, may seek me out next. Now I must be about my duties
in the lighthouse. There are all the more tasks to perform with
myself alone to turn my hand to them. But I shall return to this
letter before me on the table as soon as I may.

SCENE 12 (CH): Anxiety (final duet adapted from "God Help Our Men at Sea" by Henry Kendall)

(In the chapel, Madeleine paces and wrings her hands. Gwendolyn, Whiteside, and Williams enter.)

Madeleine: Thank you all for coming. *(She takes the hand of each in turn.)*
I just needed to talk to you and air my fears. I hope you will forgive my weakness.

Whiteside: Madam, there is no need for you to make apology. We all are concerned for the
keepers' safety.

Madeleine: This storm has been raging for a week now, and we worry for our husbands.

Gwendolyn: I am sure that something has gone wrong — I feel it in my very bones.

Williams: Yet we must believe that, since the lamps are burning, surely all is well.

Madeleine: Yes, we go, night after night, to the seaside to search for the light.
So far we always have found it. But how long can this last?

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Day after day, the storm keeps coming. Are the men truly safe in the lighthouse amidst these high waves?

Whiteside: Madam, as the architect of the lighthouse, I can assure you that it was built for just this kind of weather.

Madeleine & Gwendolyn: How can you be so sure of that?
This storm is worse than any we can remember.
Who knows how high the seas will mount?
Will the lighthouse be swept away in some great wave?
Our husbands lost forever in the deep?

Williams: No, no — this will not happen. Mr. Whiteside and I can remember worse.

Whiteside: Captain Williams is so right. Let me tell you the story.

It was nigh onto twenty-five long years ago—
The newly built lighthouse had not faced a real blow;
So when winter's cold winds began fiercely to roar,
My blacksmith and I were swift dropped on the shore
Where we worked like madmen for seven straight days.
We bolstered the pilings and strengthened the stays,
And when we were finished there came a great storm!
We huddled inside and we tried to stay warm.
We ran out of oil and fresh water was low;
Our looked-for return boat somehow didn't show.
So we drafted a letter to place in a cask;
For immediate assistance we humbly did ask.
But while we were waiting in hope of relief,
The storm became fierce with a strength past belief.

Williams: But the lighthouse stood firm against all of that fury.

Whiteside: And that's why I tell you both now not to worry:
For the lighthouse did weather those storms in the past,
And more work was done to make sure it would last.

Madeleine & Gwendolyn: Oh, how I wish I could believe
That they are safe against the wind and the fierce waves.
What if we find that something has happened to them
That you have not thought could happen?

Williams: Now ladies, I think you are worrying too much.
The fact is that this is why we have lighthouse keepers.
Their job is even more important in this kind of weather.

Whiteside: Believe me, they are well equipped to deal with the storm.
Their supplies are more than adequate. And think of the light!
If they are able to keep it lit, all is well.
So please go home and put your worries aside.

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Madeleine: We will take our leave, then, and say good night.

Gwendolyn: But our worries will not be so easily left behind. Good night for now.

Williams & Whiteside: Good night.

(Gwendolyn and Madeleine exit. Williams and Whiteside remain.)

Williams: I reckon the keepers are safe enough.
But in a storm like this, someone will surely be lost.

Williams & Whiteside:

The wild night comes like an owl to its lair,
The black clouds follow fast,
And the sun-gleams die, and the lightnings glare,
And the ships go heaving past, past, past—
The ships go heaving past!
Bar the doors, and higher, higher
Pile the faggots on the fire:
Now abroad, by many a light,
Empty seats there are to-night—
Empty seats that none may fill,
For the storm grows louder still:
How it surges and swells through the gorges and dells,
Under the ledges and over the lea,
Where a watery sound goes a-moaning around—
God help our men at sea!

Oh! never a tempest blew on the shore
But that some heart did moan
For a darling voice it would hear no more
And a face that had left it lone, lone, lone—
A face that had left it lone!
She is watching by a pane
Darkened with the gusty rain,
Watching, through a mist of tears,
Sad with thoughts of other years,
For a loved one she does miss
In a stormy time like this.
Ah! the torrent howls past, like a fiend on the blast,
Under the ledges and over the lea;
And the pent waters gleam, and the wild surges scream—
God help our men at sea!

Ah, Lord! they may grope through the dark to find
Thy hand within the gale;
And cries may rise on the wings of the wind
From mariners weary and pale, pale, pale—
From mariners weary and pale!
'Tis a fearful thing to know,
While the storm-winds loudly blow,

For Those in Peril

That a man can sometimes come
Too near to his father's home
So that he shall kneel and say,
Lord, I would be far away!
Ho! the hurricanes roar round a dangerous shore,
Under the ledges and over the lea;
And there twinkles a light on the billows so white—
God help our men at sea!

(Williams and Whiteside exit.)

SCENE 13 (LH): Griffith's Second Letter

(Griffith enters from the platform door and hangs up his dripping cloak. He seats himself and begins to write a letter. After a few minutes of writing, he stands and reads from the letter.)

Griffith: Three days and nights have passed since I last put pen to paper. As well as maintaining the light for shipping, I have engaged myself on the most gruesome of tasks. Fearing others may read too much into our past quarrels and say that Thomas Howell's death was by my own hand, I have constructed a box from old timbers and placed his corpse inside it. This I have hung from the lantern rail of the lighthouse so it may be seen by any vessel that passes. Sadly, the wind has shredded and torn away the white cloth of my distress signal and I have nothing more to replace it. But my prayers would be answered if a ship sails near enough to see the box and come to my aid.

(Griffith sits and writes again, then looks up to read what he has written.)

I would to God Thomas and I had kept to honest labor on our farms in Mathry Parish. Work on the lighthouse may have brought for us more reward in silver coin but here, twenty miles out to sea from St David's Head, I fear my sole companion is the very Devil who surely lurks in the shadows of this tower.

SCENE 14 (CH): For Those in Peril (final quartet: words by William Whiting)

(Whiteside and Williams are in the chapel, awaiting the arrival of Madeleine and Gwendolyn.)

Madeleine: Mr. Whiteside. Captain Williams. You have news for us?

Whiteside: Uncertain news, I'm afraid. We don't quite know what to make of it.

Gwendolyn: I knew it! Something has happened...

Madeleine: Please tell us!

Whiteside: Captain Williams will tell you what we know.

Williams: *(hesitantly)* Well, we have had — a report from a passing vessel. Well, that is, more than one report, as it happens. Let me gather my thoughts. The vessels that have sailed past the lighthouse in the last ten days

For Those in Peril

have reported they've seen something odd — a large object, perhaps of wood, hanging from the lantern rail, just below the top of the lighthouse. We think it might be some kind of distress signal.

Ladies: Dear God!

Williams: (*quickly*) But the lamps are burning still, as always.

Whiteside: Which leaves us puzzled as to what might have happened.

Madeleine: You must send them relief at once!

Gwendolyn: Yes, please, at once!

Whiteside: Sad to say, we cannot— the current weather does not permit this.

Williams: The vessels that observed the strange object all went past in high seas.

Whiteside: There was no chance of landing any boat on the rocks.

Williams: And that is still the case. There is no way to know how much longer this storm will continue. As soon as the seas subside enough to land a boat — we shall set out at once.

Whiteside: To send a rescue team out now would be to endanger their lives as well.

Williams: We can only wait.

Whiteside: And of course, we can also pray.

Ladies: Oh! That is all we have done for a fortnight!

They tell us to wait and to pray;
We can't stand to wait one more day!
This nightmare goes on without end—
We simply cannot comprehend
How long we can last while we wait,
Without a clue as to their fate!

Whiteside: We understand how difficult this is for you.
We considered not telling you about the distress signal.
But we felt you had a right to know, and that's why we brought this news.

Ladies: Yes, I suppose we should thank you.
It is better to know, of course.

Williams: Perhaps we could now sing the Mariners' Hymn?

Whiteside: A prayer for all those caught in this storm.

Ladies: Yes, we would like that very much.

For Those in Peril

Quartet: Eternal Father, strong to save,
 Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,
 Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep
 Its own appointed limits keep;
 Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
 For those in peril on the sea!

O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard
And hushed their raging at Thy word,
Who walkedst on the foaming deep,
And calm amidst its rage didst sleep;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

Most Holy Spirit! Who didst brood
Upon the chaos dark and rude,
And bid its angry tumult cease,
And give, for wild confusion, peace;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

O Trinity of love and power!
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;
Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee,
For those in peril on the sea!

(The chapel group breaks up and exits.)

SCENE 15 (LH): Griffith's Third Letter

(Griffith paces the lighthouse chamber.)

Griffith: Another day has passed, and the unceasing storms continue unabated.

Oh, Madeleine— how I hope that I will see your face again,
And take your hands in mine and gaze into your eyes.
Oh, my dear wife— how I miss those quiet days of farming life,
Which now to me seems like some long-lost paradise.
Oh, children mine— how I long to see those eyes that do so brightly shine,
And fill your heads with tales of far-off mystic lands.
Oh, Thomas Howell— how I miss you even with your bitter scowl,
And pray that you have found peace in the good Lord's hands.
Oh, Madeleine— how I hope that I will see your face again,
And take your hands in mine and gaze into your eyes.

(He sits down and resumes writing on the letter.)

No passing vessel has set down a boat to row nearby and investigate

For Those in Peril

the reason why a timber construction should be hung from
the lantern rail. But in these seas I do not think I can blame them.
None has been able to approach the lighthouse by so much as half-a-league.
Worse, the winds have buffeted the wooden box in such a way as to loosen its lid.
My relief from the lighthouse is still more than three weeks away.
I do not see how I can retain my sanity for such a length of time.
All that is left to me is to pray to The Good Lord for my soul.
And it is my hope that, safely abed in Mathry Parish,
my beloved wife prays to the Lord, too.

SCENE 16 (CH): Madeleine's Prayer

(In the chapel, Madeleine kneels at the prie-dieu, then stands to sing with quiet pleading.)

Madeleine: Lord, hear this prayer I make to Thee;
Watch o'er my love, amidst the sea.
Calm all the storms that rage around;
Make smooth the waves that crash and pound.
Let peace descend on sea and land;
May your sweet voice these things command.
God of all things that are to be,
Hear now my prayer, my fervent plea:
Bring home to me all safe my love,
Guarded by angels from above.
Lord, hear this prayer I make to Thee;
From my dread fear, now set me free.
Lord, hear this prayer I make to Thee;
Bring my love safely home to me.

SCENE 17 (LH): Griffith's Fourth Letter

(Griffith is sleeping uneasily on his cot. There is the sound of a thump offstage, and suddenly the silhouette of a hand can be seen in the window above his cot, swaying back and forth. Griffith comes awake with a start and leaps to his feet. When he looks at the window, he is visibly shaken and staggers to the table and takes up his pen with shaking hand. When he has written for a time, he looks up to sing.)

Griffith: Now I know this place is wicked beyond the power of the darkest dream.
The lid of the wooden box has quite fallen away and Thomas Howell's dead
right arm now hangs within inches of the lighthouse window.
And I swear it is beckoning me outside to face the harshness of the waves
and the evil spirits that manifest themselves on the surface of the sea.
Back and forth the arm swings like a dread pendulum.
The forefinger of Thomas is extended as a pointer to the spirit-world
only his dead eyes can see.

(He stands and begins to pace.)

I know not how much longer I can last.
The duty of the lamps is all that keeps me going on,
And the vision of my wife and children waiting,
Waiting on the shore for my return.

For Those in Peril

I pray to God that I shall see them again.

SCENE 18 (CH): The Prayer Vigil

(Gwendolyn enters the chapel where Madeleine has just finished her prayer.)

Gwendolyn: Perhaps if we pray together? This is the prayer I have chosen.

Madeleine: I'm happy to join you in prayer. Together our strength will be greater.

Gwendolyn: The Good Lord will hear us, I'm sure, for two prayers are better than one!

(She hands an open prayer book to Madeleine. They kneel at the prie-dieu and sing.)

Ladies: O God, whose fatherly care reaches to the uttermost parts of the earth:
We humbly beseech Thee graciously to behold and bless those whom we love,
now absent from us. Defend them from all dangers of soul and body;
and grant that both they and we, drawing nearer to Thee,
may be bound together by Thy love in the communion of the
Holy Spirit, and in the fellowship of Thy saints;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(As they finish, Williams and Whiteside burst into the chapel in great excitement.)

Williams: We were told we might find you here. We have great news!
The storm has lessened sufficiently that we believe we can land on the rock.

Whiteside: I will go with the relief ship and make sure that your husbands are well.
Do not worry over much; I built the lighthouse strong against the waves.

Ladies: Please, take them these portraits of ours, so that they might
recall their wives who are waiting.

Men: We will be glad to take them these, and to remind them that you faithfully love them.

(The men take the small portraits, clasp hands briefly with the ladies, and then exit in haste.)

Ladies: Our husbands will be coming home at last!

(Gwendolyn exits after embracing Madeleine.)

Madeleine: I wait with quiet confidence
For you, dear husband, to return.
Whatever may have come to pass,
I know that you have done your best.
This very day I shall see you,
And hold you close against my breast.
So now, until you take my hand,
My prayer shall see you safely home.

SCENE 19 (LH): Madness and Relief

For Those in Peril

(Griffith is again seated at the table, writing spasmodically at a letter. He is haggard and worn. He stops writing, picks up his bible and clutches it to his chest.)

Griffith: I have taken to sleeping with The Good Book as my pillow, in the hope it will protect me from the darkness of the otherworld. Even so, I close my eyes in rest for scarcely an hour through the hours of night. As I lay in my bunk last night, scarce after one o'clock, the Demon's knock interrupted my fearful dreams. Then I saw it was the sound of the dead hand of Thomas Howell tap-tapping against my night-window that I heard. It was then I knew, as surely as I know the grass and flowers may grow on a land I fear will never be mine to see again, that the dead finger of Thomas was pointing out for the sea-goblins and wraiths on the water the way in to the lighthouse. There they will find the wretch shivering within. My very soul is imperilled.

(He staggers to his feet, staring at the silhouette of the dead man's arm in the window. The bible falls from his hands.)

Griffith: This is something I can no longer endure...
O, Beloved wife! ... O, My Dearest Lord! ... God ... Save... Me...

(Griffith collapses on the floor, moaning and muttering, and finally falling silent.)

Williams *(offstage, in the distance)*: Ahoy! Ahoy the lighthouse!

(Griffith does not stir as Williams and Whiteside enter from the downstage entrance.)

Whiteside: Oh, my God! Is that Griffith? Is he alive?

(Williams kneels next to the prone form of Griffith and grasps his shoulder. Griffith utters an inarticulate moan.)

Williams: Yes, praise God. But overcome by something, I know not what. But where is Howell?

(Whiteside looks around him and recoils in horror when he sees the dead arm of Howell in the window.)

Whiteside: He is here, I think. In this window that looks out on death and some mystery that we may never discover. What could have happened here, I wonder?

(Williams stands and notices the letters on the table.)

Williams: Perhaps the answer is here, in these letters he wrote.

(As Williams reaches for the letters, Griffith suddenly scrambles to his feet.)

Griffith: Who are you? Are you the Devil's very demons come to drag me down to hell?

Williams: No, no — we are your friends! Do not fear us!

(Griffith cowers against the wall in terror as the other two men slowly approach him. He shudders violently when they each grasp an arm.)

For Those in Peril

Whiteside: Still now, still: we have come to take you home.

(Reaching into his vest, he pulls out a portrait, glances at it, then presents it to Griffith.)

Williams: Look here, O Thomas, at the face of your beloved wife,
who has prayed for you every day and night.

Griffith: *(staring at the portrait)* Dear Madeleine!

Williams & Whiteside: Now the time has come for you to go home.
Calm yourself, think of your dear wife's love for you, and take heart:
You'll soon be home again.

Williams: You remember the sailors' song that they sing when they're headed for home?

Hooroo, my boys, we're homeward bound,
(joined by Whiteside) Good-bye, farewell, good-bye, farewell!
Hooroo, my boys, we're homeward bound,
Hooroo, my boys, good-bye, fare you well.
We're homeward bound, we're homeward bound, good-bye, fare you well.

(Griffith joins them, weakly, for the second verse, then sings more strongly on the third verse.)

O fare you well, I wish you well.
Good-bye, farewell, good-bye, farewell!
O fare you well, I wish you well.
Hooroo, my boys, good-bye, fare you well.
We're homeward bound, we're homeward bound, good-bye, fare you well.

We're homeward bound, and so they say.
Good-bye, farewell, good-bye, farewell!
We're homeward bound, and so they say.
Hooroo, my boys, good-bye, fare you well.
We're homeward bound, we're homeward bound, good-bye, fare you well.

(By the end of the song, Griffith seems somewhat more self-possessed, but is still shaky and confused. Williams ushers him to the downstage entrance.)

Williams: *(with an arm around Griffith, aside to Whiteside.)*
Best not to question our friend here just now.
I'll take him down and send the others up.

Whiteside: We'll need some help in bringing back poor Howell.

(Williams nods; he and Griffith exit. Whiteside looks at the arm in the window.)

Whiteside: How I pity his poor wife. Oh, what misfortune could have befallen him?
I pray his soul may rest in peace.

(He moves over to the table and picks up the letter as the lights go down on the lighthouse scene.)

For Those in Peril

SCENE 20 (CH): Coming Home (adapted from music by Charles Willeby with words by D. Eardley-Wilmot)

(Madeleine and Gwendolyn are in the chapel and sing together.)

Madeleine: Soon they shall be here and all will be well.

Gwendolyn: All we can do now is welcome them home.

Duet: There is many a step goes lighter, coming home;
 There is many an eye grows brighter, coming home.
 All the way seems to remind you
 Of sweet memories that bind you
 To dear distant days behind you, coming home!

 You forget your load of sorrow, coming home;
 It will wait until the morrow, coming home.
 You can see the kind smiles beaming
 And the tender eyes a-gleaming:
 Oh! the longing and the dreaming, coming home.

(Instrumental music as a grim-faced Williams and Whiteside enter, and the ladies rush to them, then reel in shock as they learn the news. Lights go down on the chapel. The narrator enters as at the beginning of the opera.)

EPILOGUE: The Narrator's Final Words

Narrator: Let the sea will go as it has gone before,
 Reaching with idle fingers for the shore;
 Let storm clouds fly across the sea and land,
 As ever shall their threat be here at hand;
 So let them go, and exercise their power,
 And let some others go to that far tower.
 Sleep, sleep, now sleep in death or sleep in madness,
 While those who love you weep in sadness.
 I will shine on, above this world of woe,
 And wonder at this Love that I shall never know;
 And listen to the prayers made endlessly
 For those in peril on the sea.

(Exit narrator.)

END OF OPERA