

Cast and Brief Synopsis

Narrator (The Morning and Evening Star)	<i>Soprano</i>
Gwendolyn Howell, wife of Howell	<i>Soprano</i>
Madeleine Griffith, wife of Griffith	<i>Mezzo-soprano</i>
Thomas Howell, lighthouse keeper	<i>Tenor</i>
Henry Whiteside, lighthouse architect	<i>Tenor</i>
Thomas Griffith, lighthouse keeper	<i>Baritone</i>
Rhys Williams, lighthouse service officer	<i>Bass-baritone</i>

Note: one singer may sing both tenor roles.

PART ONE

Prologue & Scene 1. The narrator muses on her distant view of the world that she perceives as the morning and the evening star, then introduces this tale of those in peril on the sea. Madeleine and Griffith come to the dock where Griffith is to meet the lighthouse service officer, Captain Williams, to be taken to the lighthouse for his tour of duty. Madeleine pleads with him to stay, but Griffith reiterates his need for the pay he will earn, having taken bad financial advice the year before.

Gwendolyn and Howell arrive; Gwendolyn also begs her husband to stay, but he dismisses her concerns. Howell notices Griffith, and the two exchange ominous remarks before Williams arrives to take them away. Madeleine offers her friendship to Gwendolyn, and the two sing a prayer for their husbands' safety. After a brief musical interlude, the scene shifts to the lighthouse where Williams has just shown the two men around and now asks for questions. In the ensuing dialogue, it becomes clear that Griffith and Howell do not like each other. After a trio that begins with Williams' advice to the men the scene concludes with Williams' aside, hoping they can avoid killing each other during their stay at the lighthouse.

Scene 2. Madeleine reads from a letter she is writing, to help keep her husband in her thoughts during his absence.

Scene 3. The narrator sings of the sacrifices that lighthouse keepers make, while Griffith is seated in the background.

Scene 4. Madeleine explains that she has devoted each Sunday evening to her letter writing, and tells of events at home.

Scene 5. Howell accuses Griffith of taking his bible, and continues to accuse him even after Griffith locates the bible.

They sing a duet bemoaning the ill-feeling between them, but neither shows any thought of actual reconciliation.

Scene 6. On a warm autumn evening, Madeleine worries about Griffith's safety when winter storms arrive.

Scene 7. Griffith begins to sing the Ballad of Grace Darling, and Howell joins him. After the song, Howell disparages Griffith's singing, then points out that the behavior of the sea-birds suggests that bad weather is coming.

Scene 8. The narrator sings of the coming storm at harvest time, and warns that the "west wind [shall] thresh the grain."

Scene 9. When Griffith returns from the light with the news that the storm is here, Howell complains that Griffith's cooking is awful. In the middle of the ensuing argument, Howell loses his temper and charges at Griffith, who steps aside to watch Howell clutch his chest and collapse. Griffith is shocked to discover that his companion is dead.

PART TWO

Scene 10. Gwendolyn comes to the chapel to pray for her husband; she has an awful feeling that he might well be dead.

Scene 11. In the now raging storm, Griffith begins a letter to his wife to relate the tale of Howell's unexpected demise.

Scene 12. Madeleine asks Gwendolyn, Captain Williams, and lighthouse architect Henry Whiteside to the chapel to hear her concerns about the safety of the light-keepers during the storm. Whiteside tells the story of the improvements to the lighthouse structure that were made shortly after it was built and assures her that it is safe. The women are skeptical but forced to accept his judgment. After they depart, Whiteside and Williams sing a duet, "God help our men at sea."

Scene 13. Griffith continues his letter with a description of his building a box to contain Howell's body and hanging it from the lantern rail of the lighthouse, in the hopes that a passing ship will see it and investigate.

Scene 14. Whiteside and Williams summon the wives to the chapel to inform them of the sighting of something unusual at the lighthouse, but explain that the storm has created such high seas that they cannot yet land on the rocks to investigate. The quartet sings the Mariners' Hymn, "For those in peril on the sea."

Scene 15. Griffith sings wistfully of his wife and children at home, and continues his letter, expressing his fear that he cannot retain his sanity for the remaining three weeks of his tour of duty.

Scene 16. Madeleine comes to the chapel and sings a prayer for her husband's safety.

Scene 17. Griffith continues his letter with the gruesome tale of Howell's dead arm appearing outside his window.

Scene 18. Madeleine and Gwendolyn meet in the chapel to pray for their husbands' safety. Williams and Whiteside burst into the chapel in great excitement with the news that the seas have subsided sufficiently that a ship with a relief crew can now be sent to the lighthouse. The ladies give them portraits of themselves to give to their husbands as reminders of their faithful love. After the others leave, Madeleine sings another brief prayer.

Scene 19. A haggard and worn Griffith breaks down and collapses after writing the last few paragraphs of his letter. Williams and Whiteside discover him, then recoil in shock at Howell's body hanging outside the window. Griffith suddenly revives and wildly asks if they are the Devil's demons come to drag him down to hell. They try to calm him and the trio sings a traditional sailors' song, "Homeward bound."

Scene 20. Madeleine and Gwendolyn are in the chapel and sing a duet, "Coming home," as they await their husbands' return. A grim-faced Williams and Whiteside enter; the ladies rush to them, then reel in shock as they learn the news. The narrator enters and reflects on the endless prayers that are made for those in peril on the sea.