

GRAVITY OF LOVE SAMPLE

From Act II, scene 1: JAMIE, convinced his favorite deer, Roland, has been killed by the bow hunters, has intentionally cut his arm, making himself bleed. THEA has bandaged the wound. She and JAMIE are talking on the back porch. JASON is searching his files in the living room for something.

(JASON, not finding what he's looking for, turns instead to a drawer in his file cabinet, checking quickly through folders of photocopied articles.)

THEA

Oh. Listen to me, Jamie Swift. You don't have to show your body to anyone. It's your private property. More than anything else in this world. But if there's something about it that bothers you.... That you don't understand....

JAMIE

I hate it!

THEA

It's yours to hate. If you want to.

JAMIE

I *don't* want to!

(JAMIE begins unzipping his coat.)

THEA

Bodies come in all shapes and sizes.

(JAMIE slowly pulls up his sweater and unbuttons his shirt.

(JASON, still frustrated, returns to a set of bound journals in a different part of the bookshelf. He pulls a couple before finding what he's been searching for. He returns to his chair and starts reading.)

JAMIE

But some got made wrong.

(JAMIE squints shut his eyes and pulls up his undershirt. He has a large, dark birthmark on one side of his chest.)

THEA
So. Do you know what that's called?

(Tears start welling in JAMIE's clenched eyes. THEA puts her arm around him.)

JAMIE
Pop says it's a birthmark.

THEA
Do you talk to him about it?

JASON
What's to talk about?

THEA
You think it's ugly.

JAMIE
It *is* ugly!

THEA
Not to me.

JAMIE
Well it is to me!

THEA
Deer have different markings, too. May I touch it?

(JAMIE grimaces, but nods.
THEA gently strokes the mark.)

It's so soft. Does it hurt?

(JAMIE shakes his head.)

JAMIE
I hate it! I don't want them to see it!

THEA
Of course. They'd tease you.

JAMIE
They tease me anyway. 'Cause Pop's so old.

THEA
They'll always find something, you know.

JAMIE
Did you get teased?

THEA
It never stopped.

JAMIE
About what?

THEA
About being girlish, and shy, and bad at sports. Stuff like that.

JAMIE
I thought you were a tomboy. I don't get it. Did the boys tease you, or the girls?

THEA
Both. I was an easy target for everyone.

JAMIE
Like Roland.

THEA
Poor Roland!

JAMIE
Poor *someone*.

(JASON, holding the volume he's been reading, opens the porch door.)

JASON
Jay. To bed.

JAMIE
Not tired, Pop.

JASON
Nonetheless.... I want you to go to bed.

JAMIE
I'm staying here.

Bed, Jay. JASON

I'm not going. JAMIE

Don't defy me, Jaime. Go. JASON

(JAMIE makes no move.)

Thea, there's something I'd like to discuss with you. JASON

Of course. THEA

Alone. JASON

So go talk. JAMIE

I will not leave you here by yourself. Upstairs, Jamie Swift! JASON

What's to happen on a porch? JAMIE

It's not the porch I'm concerned about. I want you inside. JASON

He could stay by the window, where you could see him. THEA

He could be gone in a second! JASON

He won't do that. I think we understand each other. Don't we? THEA

(JAIME nods.)

I'm glad *you* understand one another. I don't understand either of you! JASON

Oh? THEA

JASON
No, neither one of you!

THEA
It sounds like we'd *better* talk!

JASON
So, Jay, if you would be kind enough to obey me....

THEA
He'll stay right here. I promise. I *can* make that promise, can't I, Jay?
(JAIME shrugs.)

THEA
You said you were a promise keeper.
(JAIME nods meaningfully.)

THEA
Jay?
(JAMIE's hands move restlessly to his head, his hair.)

JAIME
I...am...a...promise keeper.

JASON
Leave your hair alone! Sit in the window, then. In full sight. And remember your promise!
(JAIME slides across the floor and leans against the window sill.)

THEA
So what have we to discuss, Dr. Swift?
(THEA goes to the door. JASON is uncertain, reluctant.)

JASON
Not out my sight for a minute! A second!
(JASON and THEA enter the living room.)

JASON
In Chapter Seven, you refer to Chomsky.

THEA

His *Sound Patterns of English*, yes.

JASON

Something rang a bell, a distant bell. I seemed to recall reading an article somewhere raising similar issues to those you address in your book.

THEA

Oh?

JASON

I was struck at the time by the article's sure-footedness in very difficult terrain.

THEA

Structural linguistics versus generative grammar.

JASON

Precisely. In fact, I remember thinking, "Well, at least *someone* seems able to get Chomsky's drift! I've never been able to. Of course, it isn't my field.

THEA

And you found the article.

JASON

I did. In a 1969 Journal of the Modern Language Association. Written by....

THEA

Dr. Thomas Hanson...and Frederick Lowrie.

JASON

And then the penny dropped. I did recall Frederick Lowrie at Amherst. Very bright, very promising. I now even think I have some faint recollection of his summer visits to New Harbor. Yet he gets no mention in your book, even though his article was clearly seminal to your theories. And, in the bargain, you seem to have appropriated Frederick's name in some fashion. We have, I think, a serious ethical question here.

THEA

My article. My visits to New Harbor. I *was* Frederick Lowrie, Dr. Swift. Born and baptized.

JASON

Am I to understand...?

THEA

Yes.

JASON

I see. I see that we are tripping over candor once more.

THEA

Did you ask?

JASON

Why on earth would I have?

THEA

Did I lie?

JASON

How could I have asked? It never entered my mind!

THEA

That was "Frederick's" first and last academic publication.

JASON

Written, from what it says here, as a precocious Master's candidate at MIT, Chomsky's own turf.

THEA

Correct. Can you imagine how I felt, getting into the MLA journal, as a *Master's* candidate, no less.? Even if it was on Hanson's coattails. It was that article that got me into Amherst's doctoral program.

JASON

But then, somewhere along the way, you discarded the promising young man, Frederick Lowrie. Why?

THEA

No one was discarded. He became who he was meant to be.

JASON

You assumed a new identity. That much you'll have to concede.

THEA

I released my true one. "Identity" isn't a word to use carelessly.

JASON

I, of all people, am not careless with words. You assumed a new *persona*, then.

THEA

No. My "self," was *always* "Thea." The *persona* was "Frederick." An enforced persona. For 27 years.

JASON

You're a *man*, "Ms. Lowrie."

THEA

I am *not*. "Frederick" was a... a Halloween costume. But one I couldn't take off. Not at bedtime, not even to take a bath. The only place it ever came off in my childhood was in my dreams. And when it did, there was always the same little girl peering out a window, a broken window with dirty, wicked-looking shards of glass.

JASON

All children have nightmares.

THEA

The room is stifling. The window is too small to crawl through. I must wake Mom and Poppa upstairs. I open my mouth to scream. I can't, my mouth is swarming with wasps. The house is on fire.

JASON

They don't become someone else because of their nightmares.

(First light is breaking outside.)

THEA

Does Jay have nightmares, Dr. Swift?

JASON

He doesn't say.

THEA

Ever ask him?

(JASON is silent.)

THEA

Jay hates his body, too.

JASON

Nonsense.

THEA

He pulls out its hair. He cuts its skin. And the birthmark?

JASON

He told you?

THEA

Showed me. Let me touch it. And you can't even talk to him about it!

JASON
Our bodies are a private matter.

THEA
You seem preoccupied with mine.

JASON
It's your *character* that preoccupies me.

THEA
Dr. Swift... Suppose the mind and body can't coexist—in a person of "good" character. What then?

JASON
You talk like a Jesuit.

THEA
Maim the mind so it conforms to the body? Or maim the body so it conforms to the mind?

JASON
I would *never* maim a mind. Never!

THEA
The defense rests.

JASON
I deny such choices exist.

THEA
Walk a mile in my size 9 ½ pumps and then tell me that.

JASON
And where did these...shoes of yours take you? After Amherst?

THEA
To Korea. As a paramedic.

JASON
Frederick? Or "Thea"? You'll excuse my obtuseness about all this.

THEA
We are not two people, Doctor Swift.

JASON
You most certainly are.

THEA

Only one set of eyes saw the carnage I saw. And only one person was humiliated by a dishonorable discharge.

JASON

Ah?

THEA

I'll spare you the details.

JASON

Please do! But perhaps they cast the shadow of your real motivation. A way to escape the stigma. Dispose of "Frederick's" body.

THEA

That's a hateful thing to say!

(On the porch, JAMIE slides down below the window sill, inching his way over to the long shutter on the door. From behind it he noiselessly takes a shotgun, stealthily crawls down the steps, gets up and bolts for the woods...leaving his bundle behind.)

JASON

You piled dishonor upon dishonor. Honor would have compelled you to face the future as who you were.

THEA

I did. Just as I face you now as who I am.

JASON

Honor, Ms. Lowrie, *honor*.

THEA

So much for your house without prejudice.

JASON

I am not ashamed to be prejudiced against dishonesty. *Or* cowardice.

THEA

It's hard to be cowardly in the heat of battle, as you may remember, Dr. Swift. It's in the small encounters of peacetime that it's hard to be brave.

JASON

Truth? Honor? Courage? Are these the stuff of *small* moments? And your parents. In Seattle. What did they say when you...disposed of their son?

THEA

They did something far more important than sending me to a psychiatrist.

JASON

And what, may I ask, was that?

THEA

They held me in orbit.

JASON

I didn't ask for riddles.

THEA

I told them at supper one night, told them what I had decided to do, what I felt I *had* to do. Chicken Divan. Cheese and mayonnaise and broccoli—a favorite of “Frederick’s.” I’d planned to tell them before we sat down to eat. And then I told myself I’d tell them when we’d done with Mom’s soup. I could hardly eat the chicken. “When I finish the broccoli,” I said to myself. I speared the last little florette on my fork and stared at it. One bite and our worlds would fly apart. The simple kitchen I’d known all my life. On the wall, “Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man.” Mom, talking about a neighbor who had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Poppa saying, “Sad. Very sad.” I held the broccoli to my nose and took a long, deep breath. “This smell will not change,” I remember thinking. Then I ate it and told them.

(JASON is staring impassively in the direction of his bookshelves.)

THEA (CONT.)

Stunned silence. Tears that fell out of Mom’s eyes without a sound. Poppa, biting his lip and staring, like you, at nothing. I felt dangerously weightless. “Do you want me to go?” I said. Poppa shook his head and reached out for my hand. Mom took the other. They held me between them, held me on my chair. “I never wanted to bring you pain,” I said. Mom’s sweet face, blotched and wet, the features I loved, somehow...deconstructed. “I’m crying for *your* pain, honey,” she said.