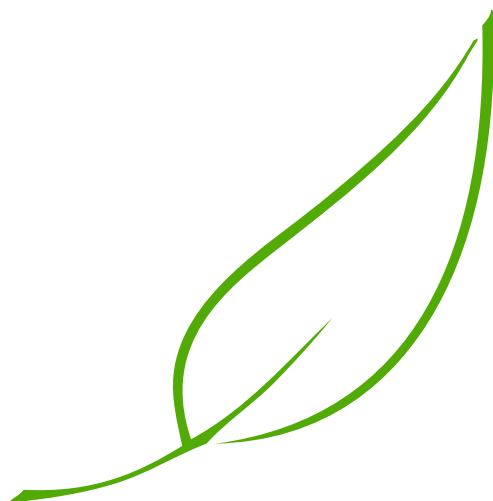


Imagination's Music: The Life And Words Of Phillis Wheatley

By Michelle Van Loon



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**IMAGINATION'S MUSIC:
THE LIFE AND WORDS OF
PHILLIS WHEATLEY**

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SYNOPSIS: The story opens as Susannah Wheatley, wife of a well-to-do Boston merchant, arrives at an auction of slaves in the summer of 1761, looking for a young girl to assist her around the house. She gets more than she bargained for in the young Phillis, who astonished the Wheatley family with her intelligence.

Moving against the conventions of the time, the Wheatley's educated Phillis. Her gift of writing is discovered and nurtured. Each family member struggles with their preconceived notions of role as it becomes obvious that Phillis' words must move outside of the four walls of the Wheatley home. Phillis Wheatley's words carry the audience from the family living room to a public poetry reading.

The interaction of Boston society with the Wheatley family presents the contrast between appreciation of Phillis' poetry and discomfort at her race. The Wheatleys continued to gently push at the boundaries until they both took ill in the days leading up the Revolutionary War. As Phillis receives her freedom on their death, the audience is left to answer the question of what the nature of freedom really is. A portion of Wheatley's poem, "On Imagination" closes the script.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(6 female, 3-4 male)

EDWARD HOPKINS.....	Owner of a large, fairly prosperous farm outside of Boston
TIMOTHY FITCH.....	Proprietor of a small fleet of slave ships
EUNICE FITCH	Timothy's wife
SUSANNAH WHEATLEY	Wife of a Boston merchant
JOHN WHEATLEY	A kind patriarch
PHILLIS WHEATLEY.....	A young African-American girl, ranging from mature childhood through young adult
MARY WHEATLEY	Daughter of Susannah and John
MRS. EVANS.....	A friend of the Wheatley family
ADULT PHILLIS-NARRATOR.....	Adult African-American woman.

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AUCTIONEER..... Offstage male voice, this part can be combined with that of either Edward Hopkins or Timothy Fitch

EXTRAS:

Male Slave

Adult friends of the Wheatley and Evans families, as many as desired.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Director's Notes: Since the focus of the script is the spoken and written word, you can use minimal set and lighting with "Imagination's Music" and still get strong dramatic effect. The set suggestions below are for a full production; however, simple furniture, minimal backdrops and costume effects can work for both actor and audience.

Phillis' story invites discussion on what the true nature of freedom is. As you begin rehearsals, there will be great value in taking some time to explore this theme with your actors. Encourage them to see her story first through their own 21st century lens - and then, to try to go back in time and enter her world. Though Wheatley's poetry is not ranked with that of various poetic masters by literary critics, the story of her words and the miracle of her mind and soul have brought her work to the attention of modern audiences in recent times. That miracle is at the heart of her character in "Imagination's Music".

SET/LIGHTING NEEDS

Scene 1 - Stage darkened except for a single spot

Scene 2 - A busy shipyard in Boston harbor, 1761. Crates, ropes and a backdrop that includes signs posting date of an upcoming slave auction.

Scene 3 - Parlor of the Wheatley home, late afternoon. Wooden or wing chairs center stage, along with a small table and lantern between them. A sideboard should be at the rear. The rest of the stage can be filled with as much or as little scenery as you desire.

Scene 4 - Same parlor, 4 months later. Lighting can indicate an earlier time of day than the previous scene.

Scene 5 - Wheatley parlor.

Scene 6 - Wheatley parlor.

Scene 7 - Wheatley parlor.

Scene 8 - Wheatley merchantile store. Include a counter, wood barrels, and a backdrop of shelving. A door with a small bell can be placed at the actor's entrance to the stage.

Scene 9 - The Fitch parlor, 1774. Same furniture can be used as in Wheatley parlor, but can be rearranged, different table cloth can be used, and the set background should be revamped to let the audience know that they are in a different house. Add additional chairs since this is a party scene.

Scene 10 - The Wheatley parlor, but with all the furniture stacked, and crates piled at rear, a small black Bible on the top of the stack.

COSTUME NEEDS

Mid-1770's costuming for all characters. Phillis should be dressed simply, but the rest of the characters should communicate comfortable affluence. The final scene will require black mourning costuming for Mary and Phillis.

PROPERTY NEEDS

Signs (per script), barrels, 5 chairs, small side table, needlework, 2 books, Bible, silverware, rags, tea service on a tray, goose quill pen, paper, lantern, sideboard, punchbowl and cups.

LIGHTING AND SOUND

Spotlights, offstage voices, African drum or chant music

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SCENE I

AT RISE: Quiet African drum or chant-song music opens the scene in total darkness. Out of the darkness, a single spot illuminates a single black man, center stage. HE is nearly naked, except for a sheet or other rag around his loins. His ankles are shackled or tied together and HE has a rope around his neck, like a leash. His back is to the audience and his head is bowed. Positioned just off the stage, but in full view of the audience, ADULT PHILLIS-NARRATOR sits on a tall stool, where SHE will remain for the entire performance. Music fades under.

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE: (*In the cadence of an AUCTIONEER*)

...Do I hear eighty, eighty? I see eighty, yes sir, I see it. Eighty-five anyone? Eighty-five? Mr. Fitch reports no trouble with this one on board his ship. He's strong, docile, trainable... Look at that nice broad back. You'll surely get your money's worth from him. Eighty-five, yes, I see eighty-five. Do I hear ninety? Yes, ninety. I've done auctions for years, and I tell you, this one is surely worth double that to any of you in need of a pair of strong arms and legs. Ninety-five? Ninety-five? Do I hear ninety-five? Yes, I see you, ninety-five. One hundred? Is there someone who'd best that ninety-five? Do I hear one hundred? This one'll work for you out in those stony fields alongside your animals. One hundred? There's years of hard work in him for you. He's an investment...he's got a full set of teeth, no vermin on him. One hundred? I see one hundred. Do I see one hundred-five? One hundred-five? All right then, one hundred once...one hundred twice...one hundred thrice. Sold!

(Gavel sounds, lights down. Spot on ADULT PHILLIS-NARRATOR sitting in chair off main stage area.)

ADULT PHILLIS-NARRATOR: That any of us could stand at all in the unblinking sunshine after weeks at sea was a miracle invisible to those gathered in the docks for the auctions. The horror of the voyage gave the endless water a personality all its own.
Confusion reigned till the Divine Command
On floating azure fixed the solid land,
Till first he called the latent seeds of light,
And gave dominion over eternal night.

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From deepest glooms He raised this ample ball,
 And round its walls He bade the surges roll...
 He sweeps thy surface, makes thy billows roar,
 And furious, lash the loud resounding shore...

(From "Ocean", published in the Washington Post 2/11/99, recently discovered lost work of Phillis Wheatley)

And on that shore, awaited a crowd of hard-working landowners thirsting for convenience and prosperity in their new land. Those of us on the Phillis, those of us that made it to port, were told that it was our purpose to quench their thirst.

Shivering with the sickness that saturated the ship as surely as the salt water that soaked the briny bow, I stood on the auction block and ached for home.

(Lights)

SCENE II

SETTING: A busy shipyard in Boston harbor, summer of 1761. Several signs announcing auction of slaves, including a date, are posted. Lights come up on EDWARD and TIMOTHY standing together, in friendly discussion center stage, waiting for the day's auction to begin. A moment later, SUSANNAH enters right.

SUSANNAH: ***(nodding politely)*** Good day, gentlemen.

EDWARD: Mrs. Wheatley, how's your health this glorious morning?

SUSANNAH: Improving, Mr. Hopkins. Kind of you to ask.

EDWARD: ***(turning to TIMOTHY)*** Timothy, have ye yet made Mrs. Wheatley's acquaintance?

TIMOTHY: Yes, sir... not long back we were at a small gathering at the Evans' place. Nice to see you again.

EDWARD: You're here for the auction, then, Mrs. Wheatley?
(SUSANNAH nods) Timothy tells me that they're expecting a fine, healthy, hardworking group.

TIMOTHY: What sort of stock are you out for today, Mrs. Wheatley, ma'am?

SUSANNAH: A gentle girl, someone to assist me in running my household. Now that my children are approaching marriageable age...

TIMOTHY: I got word from another captain that was in the Guinea area at the same time as my Captain A story that he'd...gathered an exceptional bunch this time over. Mr. Hopkins here tells me that he's in need of 5 or 6 men to work the new piece of land he's acquired.

SUSANNAH: Mr. Wheatley mentioned that you'd recently purchased the old Babbit parcel, is that right?

EDWARD: Yes, ma'am. I started out with a barren piece of handed-down soil, practically worthless. Seeing it produce, purchasing more property... ah yes, there's a wonderful revenge at increasing what I was handed in this life.

TIMOTHY: That's the glory of this emerging land. Who would think a lot like us could make something from nothing?

(HE claps EDWARD on the back, they both laugh heartily.)

EDWARD: I need good, hard-working men to work my earth. I've always been pleased with the quality of Timothy's stock. I don't have time to dilly-dally with unbroken rebellious creatures.

SUSANNAH: ***(meeting his gaze)*** Ah, but each of us is a rebellious creature in our own manner. Good day, gentlemen, I'd best be making my way down to the auction area. ***(SHE exits right briskly)***

EDWARD: ***(in mock humiliation)*** The Wheatleys have gotten branded with some of the righteous Reverend Whitefield's revival fires.

TIMOTHY: Each of us must have some fire to propel us in this cold world, eh, Timothy?

(HE pulls a flask out of his jacket pocket and wordlessly offers it to EDWARD.)

(EDWARD takes a long pull off of the flask, hands it back to TIMOTHY, who does the same. They exit right, laughing. Lights down. As in Scene I, out of the darkness will come an offstage sound. In this case, it will be the voice of the male auctioneer.)

OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE: ...Do I hear forty for this one? Forty? Forty? Yes, I see your forty. She is young, trainable. You'll get your money's worth from her, folks. ***(A single spot comes up on PHILLIS at center, clothed in a dirty blanket. Her back faces the audience, and the only sound SHE makes is an occasional cough.)*** She doesn't look like much, but with some decent food, she'll fill out nicely. Forty-five? Forty-five? She's a quiet one, and she'll make a great addition to your household staff. Forty-five? Do I hear forty-five? ***(SUSANNAH enters from right, standing at the edge of the spot and looking at PHILLIS.)*** Forty-five? ***(SUSANNAH nods, as if catching the eye of the auctioneer. His voice will fade out as HE delivers the following lines, and the same African music or chant as in Scene I will come under and***

then up.) I see your forty-five, good lady. Do I hear fifty? Fifty? All right, then... this little one goes to the lady over there for forty-five...

(At the same time, as the auctioneer's voice fades out, SUSANNAH reaches out to touch PHILLIS' chin, and gently turns PHILLIS around to face her. They make eye contact, and the lights go down.)

ADULT PHILLIS-NARRATOR:

On Death's domain intent I fix my eyes.
Where human nature in vast ruin lies:
With pensive mind I search the drear abode,
Where the great conqueror has his spoils, bestowed;
There the offspring of six thousand years
In endless numbers to my view appears:
Whole kingdoms in his gloomy den are thrust,
And nations mix with their primeval dust:
Insatiate still he gluts the ample tomb:
His is the present, his is the age to come.

(From "To A Gentleman and a Lady On The Death Of The Lady's Brother And Sister, And A Child Of The Name Of Avis, Aged One Year.")

(a couple of beats) I died a death that day on the auction block. I didn't have the words for it at the time, but the words came thundering into my heart as I was birthed into my new life in the Wheatley household.

SCENE III

The Wheatley parlor, a comfortably wealthy family home, Winter, 1762.

AT RISE: *PHILLIS lights a lantern on the table, center, then goes to sit downstage left, sits cross-legged on the floor, and continues polishing silver. It's late afternoon, and MARY and SUSANNAH are sitting in chairs center stage with the table and lantern between them. A small table separates them. There is an empty chair directly behind them sitting next to a sideboard. SUSANNAH is working on a small piece of needlework, and MARY is reading aloud to her.*

MARY: ...But true expression, like the unchanging sun,
Clears and improves whate'er it shines upon;
It gilds all objects, but alters none..

(from "An Essay on Criticism")

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SUSANNAH: So well put! Alexander Pope used his words like swords, cutting to the heart of the matter.

MARY: He can be a bit cynical for my taste.

SUSANNAH: Sometimes it can take a troubled soul like Pope's to get the rest of us mortals to think and question...

(JOHN enters right, crosses to kiss SUSANNAH in greeting, ad libs greeting to MARY, begins removing his hat, gloves, etc.)

JOHN: ***(A note of exhaustion in his voice)*** Well, it's been quite a day..

MARY: Do sit down, father, and tell us all about it.

(SHE sets the volume of poetry on the table, and rises to pull the chair at rear toward their seats. SHE returns to her seat.)

SUSANNAH: You sound troubled, John.

JOHN: It's our good king George. He's done it again. ***(HE holds up his hands, pantomiming pressing down)*** He's squeezing money out of his colonies here to finance his disagreement with France... ***(spitting his words bitterly)*** his tax collector stopped by early this afternoon looking for more money...

SUSANNAH: But I thought you'd paid him in full last month...

JOHN: So did I, my dear. It seems that he's altering his records and lining his pockets with the "extra."

MARY: What will you do, Father?

JOHN: The Bible tells us to "render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's." Unfortunately, it doesn't offer me much guidance on what to do with a low-life tax thief.

SUSANNAH: But our Lord dealt with tax collectors and their ilk all the time. He becomes their friend, and dealt with them on matters of the heart.

MARY: ***(turning to PHILLIS, speaking slowly)*** Miss Phillis, could you please bring our tea now?

(PHILLIS nods in assent, rises, exits left. SUSANNAH's eyes follow her out.)

SUSANNAH: ***(to MARY)*** You needn't speak to her so slowly. She understands every word you say to her.

MARY: ***(defensively)*** She's been here but five months. Our English is so different from her mother tongue...

SUSANNAH: ***(shakes her head)*** I disagree, my dear. There's a depth to her understanding.

JOHN: *(flipping his hand, returning to the subject at hand)*
Susannah, I value your wisdom on this financial matter a great deal. The good citizens I've spoken with this week have all expressed outrage. We're an ocean away from the King, but he still manages to reach across and hold us in his debtor's prison.

SUSANNAH: Surely if there are others, you could bond together, meet with the man, and discuss the matter rationally.

JOHN: There's no reasoning with a snake, my dear. Yet he's our king's chosen representative here in the colony.

(PHILLIS enters left carrying a tray bearing a teapot and three cups. SHE sets it on the sideboard at rear, begins pouring and serving tea, first to MARY.)

MARY: *(receiving the cup, speaking slowly and deliberately)*
Thank you, Miss Phillis. Father, when Rev. Whitefield spoke, he reminded us that our allegiance must be to our heavenly King.

(PHILLIS pours another cup and hands it to SUSANNAH, returns to pour the third cup.)

SUSANNAH: So true, dear. God's kingdom often uses foolish looking soldiers, armed with nothing more than His Words: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs... *(PHILLIS chimes in softly with her as SHE delivers the cup to JOHN)* is the kingdom of heaven. *(SUSANNAH looks surprised, but continues with PHILLIS)* 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.'

(SUSANNAH stops, but silently urges PHILLIS on)

PHILLIS: *(looks around fearfully, but gathers her courage from their permission)* 'Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God...' *(A moment of silence hangs in the air, as the Wheatleys process what has just occurred. PHILLIS looks apologetically at SUSANNAH)* I'm sorry ma'am. That's what I know.

SUSANNAH: My dear, that's wonderful.

PHILLIS: Thank you, ma'am. *(SHE carries serving tray offstage.)*

MARY: Mother? What on earth?

SUSANNAH: Earth had nothing to do with that child's gifts, my dear. God brought her into our home so they could be unwrapped properly, that's all.

JOHN: What have you done now, Susannah? What have you done now? (*SUSANNAH smiles at him as the lights go down..*)

SCENE IV

The Wheatley parlor, 5 months later.

AT RISE: SUSANNAH is standing behind the seated JOHN, massaging his shoulders.

SUSANNAH: How's that?

JOHN: (*closing his eyes*) Mmmm. That's wonderful.

SUSANNAH: It feels like you've been carrying the weight of the world on those shoulders. It's not weight you were meant to carry, John.

JOHN: When I walk the streets of our city, I see people buying and selling, living their lives, consumed by the needs of the day. But I see a long shadow being cast by England. I wish I could ignore the shadow as well as it seems most of the other citizens here do.

SUSANNAH: When you say ignoring, it sounds as if they are making a conscious choice to wear a set of blinders.

JOHN: The name of the blinders is comfort. Most businessmen in this city do not want to challenge the way things are done. When I dared to ask some questions of the tax gatherer the last time he came around with an outstretched palm, he made sure to let me know that the crown didn't appreciate traitorous questions.

SUSANNAH: Since when do sincere questions transform themselves into threats against the King? I, for one, am grateful that you are unwilling to live on the surface of things. God has given you the eyes to see the lighting shadows.

JOHN: But ever I must be careful in my phrasing of my concern, I'm learning. (*HE silently communicates with her to stop rubbing, by reaching around and kissing her hand. SUSANNAH sits down in the chair next to his.*) When I feel the urge to stand on the street corner like a latter-day Elijah, proclaiming the dangers on the horizon to people who crave peace and safety, I remember that I have a great responsibility to my family first and foremost. That responsibility tempers my words.

SUSANNAH: John, first and foremost, is your responsibility to God.

JOHN: (*with an edge in his voice*) I am quite aware of that, Susannah.

(Uncomfortable silence, as if SHE has preached at him one time too often.)

SUSANNAH: (*changing the subject*) I must tell you, John, that our Mary has proved to be a very patient tutor this week. Teaching someone else has given her a wonderful opportunity to review all that she knows.

JOHN: (*clueless*) Who is she tutoring?

SUSANNAH: Phillis, of course.

JOHN: Phillis? Phillis who?

SUSANNAH: Our Phillis.

JOHN: (*rising to his feet, closing his eyes, processing this information, beginning to pace the stage*) Our Phillis.

SUSANNAH: (*not quite wanting to meet his gaze*) Yes.

JOHN: I agree with you that she is a bright little thing. But Susannah, she is a servant.

SUSANNAH: That is how she came to us, 'tis true. I went to the shipyard that day looking for some household help. I'd be remiss in my own service to God if I insisted on that plan when it became obvious that God might have some other plans for her.

JOHN: It seems obvious to me that the plan that God had in mind for her was to come here to help you around the house.

SUSANNAH: (*rising from her chair, meeting his gaze head-on*) We agree that she belongs here.

JOHN: Certainly... as a servant. That is her lot in life. Most people in Boston... or England, for that matter, don't even believe that slaves can learn. Be trained, yes, but reach beyond training to thinking and reasoning, no.

SUSANNAH: What about you, John? What do you believe about this?

JOHN: (*stopping his pacing, facing the audience as if lost in thought*) I don't know what I believe on this subject, Susannah. Phillis giving her days over to learning when she should be laundering and ironing? What will people say?

SUSANNAH: Honestly, John, I haven't considered what people will say. But I have considered what our Lord would say if I let her mind lie fallow. And I can't live with that answer.

JOHN: (*spinning to face her*) If you must educate her, can't you do it quietly, if you've any spare time?

SUSANNAH: Education is not a spare-time frivolity. It is as necessary as breathing.

JOHN: You didn't think so for the other servants who've been a part of our household over the years.

SUSANNAH: (*sitting down heavily, his words are voicing her own struggle*) 'Tis true, John. It has been Phillis who has given me new eyes on the topic.

JOHN: I said nothing when you insisted on educating Mary as well as Nathaniel. The training that Mary most needed centered around training her to run a home, not to read Cicero.

SUSANNAH: I gave her ample instruction in all the home arts, John. You know that.

JOHN: (*gentling a bit*) Yes, I do. She has learned from a master homebuilder. So, I didn't challenge you when you insisted on educating her beyond the level of many men in Boston.

SUSANNAH: If she is to be a helpmate to her husband, she should be able to debate all the issues that concern him with insight and intelligence. Otherwise, she will just be a bubblehead like Eunice Fitch, full of empty gossip. Oh, that blank stare of Eunice's when the conversation moves to topics of greater depth is enough to make me want to weep. She scares me! When Mary raises her own family someday, Lord willing, she will have substance to pass on to them.

JOHN: You have done that for this household. I am eternally grateful that you are not like Mrs. Fitch.

SUSANNAH: What makes me different than Eunice is that I invite others in our home to dine on meat, not feathers. I want Phillis to sit at our table, metaphorically speaking.

JOHN: That's where I must draw the line. She was purchased as an enhancement to our home, not as an intellectual dinner guest. Please respect my wishes not to give her days over to education. Train her on the side, teach her some Bible stories if you want, but let her do what she was brought here to do.

SUSANNAH: (*crossing to center stage, folding her arms across her chest, looking out across the audience*) John, I intend to do just that. (*lights down*)

ADULT PHILLIS-NARRATOR: Mrs. Wheatley strove to find ways to accommodate Mr. Wheatley... at first. I cleaned, I polished, I laundered, I pressed... but in the midst of those duties, I would be given snatches of time with Mary. Mary was an able tutor. But always, in the background, was Mrs. Wheatley. Her energy for my studies wrapped me as securely as a warm blanket. Mr. Wheatley was always kind to me, too. His affections were measured and cautious, but they were genuine. Mrs. Wheatley, on the other hand, poured herself into me like a river pours itself into an ocean.

SCENE V

Parlor of the Wheatley home, 1764.

AT RISE: *PHILLIS and MARY are sitting at the table and chairs on center stage. PHILLIS is bent over a text, copying, using a large goose quill pen. A large lantern is sitting on the sideboard at rear. MARY is attentively tutoring her.*

PHILLIS: *(as if reading/translating)* "I am glad you enjoyed my friend Tiro's visit, and particularly pleased to hear that you took the opportunity of his presence with a governor's authority to liberate a number of your slaves."

(As PHILLIS begins reading aloud, SUSANNAH enters stage left, stops far left to listen without intruding, a smile creeping across her face. When PHILLIS finishes, SUSANNAH crosses to them, applauding. PHILLIS rises upon realizing that her mistress has entered the room.)

SUSANNAH: Marvelous!

PHILLIS: *(eyes slightly downward)* Thank you, Mrs. Wheatley.

MARY: Mother, this girl drinks knowledge as most drink water. I can scarcely keep up with her these days.

SUSANNAH: *(picks up lantern from rear, holds it up between PHILLIS and her work so as to study PHILLIS' efforts more closely)* Excellent, my dear!

PHILLIS: The words sing to me, Mrs. Wheatley.

MARY: They sing to me, too, Miss Phillis. They sing of pain and misery!

SUSANNAH: *(chuckling, setting the lantern back on the sideboard at rear)* Child, I've always said that you're not really the master of a subject until you must teach it to someone else. And if this is what it takes for to demonstrate your command of Latin...

MARY: I am a private in the Latin army, mother, not a general. I will never have firm command of that tangle of a language.

SUSANNAH: I disagree. You underestimate yourself, my dear.

MARY: I think I estimate myself accurately. I am an average girl with an anything-but-average mother. *(rising, giving SUSANNAH's hand a squeeze as SHE readies to depart, putting on her shawl, etc.)* Now, I'm going to be like all the other average girls in this city, and go our shopping for a new hat. In English!

SUSANNAH: *(taking MARY's seat)* Now, child. How are you getting along with your studies? If you're getting bogged down, I can lighten your household duties a bit. Your first responsibility is to learn.

MARY: *(under her breath)* I don't know if Father agrees with that...

PHILLIS: **(not hearing her)** Oh, no, ma'am. I don't mind a bit of hard work. It gets my blood moving, and perhaps even clears my head so I can think better when I sit down to learn. Why do you ask?

SUSANNAH: The last few nights I've noticed a quiet light coming from under your door, late into the evening.

PHILLIS: **(concerned)** Have I kept you awake? I surely didn't intend to disturb you or Mister Wheatley.

SUSANNAH: The only thing that disturbs Mister Wheatley's slumber is politics. And lately he's been working so hard that even twenty new insults from over the sea wouldn't shake him awake at night.

PHILLIS: He does work very hard, ma'am. He's a good man.

SUSANNAH: That he is, child. It is he who noticed the dark circles under your eyes.

PHILLIS: Is he concerned that I'm not working hard enough?

SUSANNAH: Actually, the opposite might be more true. I think he is concerned that you are burning the proverbial candle on one end too many. He knows how I fret over you. Now tell me. What is keeping you up at night?

PHILLIS: Words, ma'am. It's the singing words.

MARY: **(continuing to putter with leaving)** Latin keeps me awake at night, too. It sings a dirge to me... a nightmare!

SUSANNAH: **(ignoring her)** I'm afraid I don't understand what you mean, Phillis.

PHILLIS: **(leafing through her sheaf of papers)** I... I have something to read to you. When I lay down and close my eyes, the words start singing in my mind. They are trapped there until I liberate them. Then I sleep. I didn't mean to disturb anyone else with my fancies.

(SHE pulls a paper out, and sets it on top of her schoolwork stack, then smooths it once with her hand. JOHN enters right, stands as if at the threshold of a doorway listening, meets SUSANNAH's eyes.)

SUSANNAH: **(shaking her head as if to warn JOHN off)** Let's hear, child.

PHILLIS: **(unaware of their silent communication, SHE is gathering up her nerve to continue)** At Miss Nancy Smith's funeral last week, I looked at the sorrowing faces of her parents. She was torn from their arms, and placed in the arms of God. I... I could feel the anguish they felt as they bid their little one good-bye. I prayed for them that night, and these words came to me **(SHE smooths out her paper, takes a deep breath and continues)** From dark abodes to fair ethereal light
Th' enraptur'd innocent has winged her flight



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