ARMSTRONG. Oh, this and that. Who can say really? Love's such an indefinable thing isn't it, I mean... (He begins to giggle.)
Oh for god's sake Roget, I can't keep this up another minute, of course I don't bloody love her. (Pause.)
ROGET. I knew you didn't.
ARMSTRONG. I almost had you convinced though didn't I?
ROGET. Not for a moment actually.
ARMSTRONG. "Oh Isobel, Isobel I adore you!" (He giggles.)
God, I don't know how I managed it. She really is very hard work.
ROGET. So why in hell's name are you doing it to her?
ARMSTRONG. It's all in a good cause, I assure you.
ROGET. What cause?
ARMSTRONG. There's nothing sinister in it honestly, it's all rather innocent actually. I don't know why you never thought of it yourself. So, I tell her I love her and so forth, right?
ROGET. Yes...
ARMSTRONG. I flatter her, look suitably love struck when she comes into a room, I call her beautiful —
ROGET. —But why?
ARMSTRONG. And eventually I get her into the sack.
ROGET. That would seem to be a logical, if cynical progression. It's not in itself an explanation.
ARMSTRONG. Oh for god's sake man, I get her into the sack which means she takes off her clothes —
ROGET. Not necessarily.
ARMSTRONG. I make sure she takes them off, that's the whole point because then I get to examine her beautiful back in all its delicious, twisted glory, and frankly that's all I'm interested in. Do you know the first time I saw it I got an erection?
ROGET. Your first is always exciting...
ARMSTRONG. In the same way that I find electricity exciting, or the isolation of oxygen, or the dissection of a human heart. (Roget stares at him.) I told you it was all in a good cause didn't I? I mean obviously, she's not the sort to just take her clothes off and let me have a look for a few bob. I spotted the Presbyterian bent right away. In fact I almost scuppered my chances at one point, before I'd got the full measure of her. I had to make up some awful rub-

blish about my mother being dead, which of course she isn't. So unfortunately we have to go the long route. But I'm patient. I've got all the time in the world. Halsey showed us a similar torso once but it was much milder. Extraordinary malformation of the upper vertebrae, with resultant distortion of the rib cage. And hence you see is much more severe, much more interesting, I mean it's exquisite, it's almost a poem — (Isobel runs off, stifling a cry. Roget turns round.)

ROGET. What was that?
ARMSTRONG. What? Nothing. (Roget looks at him.)
ROGET. Can I say something? (Armstrong grins.)
ARMSTRONG. Go ahead.
ROGET. You are amoral, corrupt and depraved. You are cruel, heartless, mean-spirited, barbarous. You are treacherous, despicable, and vilely contemptible. You are a low-down seducer. You're a cunt Armstrong. A complete and utter cunt. (He goes out. Armstrong shrugs, genuinely baffled at this response.)

ARMSTRONG. Why? What have I done? (Fade down lights. He goes out. Enter Maria and read a letter over scene change.)

MARIÁ. "Dear Edward,
Thank you for your sloppily written missive. I note that you and Miss Cholmondley have indeed become 'firm friends' and I am not at all sorry that you will no longer be returning to England. You have recently been the source of great animosity between my dear sister and myself, for which purpose I blame you entirely. Our quarrel resolved, I am sorry to say, in no small degree of violence. I long for something similar, but more extreme, to light upon yourself, and only wish I were able to deliver the blows myself. Please do not write to me again.

Maria Fenwick."