



## Scene synopsis

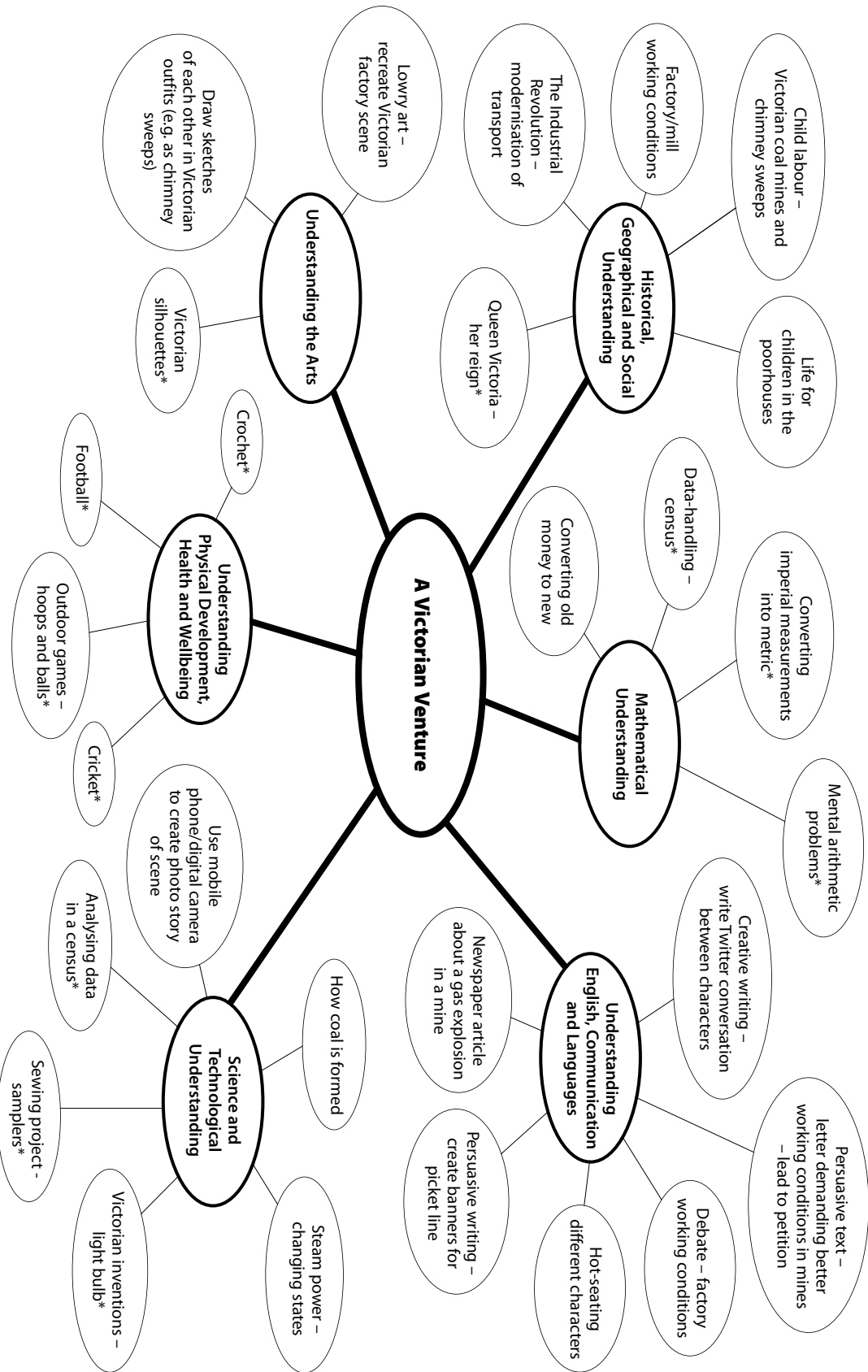
It is 1840 and the travellers find themselves in a Victorian coal mine in Yorkshire, where a young girl has been injured. They are shocked by her filthy appearance and that she doesn't go to school. She is nine years old and has been working in the pit for four years. At the surface, a mob is protesting against the working conditions in a local factory. The owner, Mr Ramsbottom, extols the virtues of industrial progress and approves of the poor remaining within their social group. Despite being a very rich man, he grumbles about paying a shoeshine boy a penny for his effort.

## Educational background

- \* *'There's something here... on the ground.'* Children as young as four or five years old would work in mines and factories. **Poverty** kept children in work rather than at school.
- \* *'... moving coal up the line.'* Children in coal mines were employed as **'hurriers'**, who would pull coal in carts from the coal-face to the surface, often with chains around their waists, or **'trappers'** who operated air doors to ensure the flow of clean, safe air within the mines.
- \* *'Useless canary. So much for an early warning...'* **Canaries** were used to detect toxic gases in mines right up until the 1980s. They are more sensitive than humans to carbon monoxide and methane so the miners had an audible warning to 'get out quick' when their canary 'snuffed it' and stopped singing.
- \* *'Up chimneys?'* Due to their small physical size, Victorian children under the age of ten had to climb up dirty, smelly, narrow and twisted chimneys to brush out soot and to keep them clean. **Lung disease** could be lethal for chimney sweeps, and often afflicted workers in dusty mines and mills too.
- \* *'Fresh air?'* Children would often work in cold, damp, dangerous mines for **12 hours a day** or more. Apart from on Sundays, when they would get a precious day off, many children wouldn't see the sun at all during the winter months.
- \* *'Better pay! Better conditions!'* **Workers had few rights** and labour was cheap and considered expendable. Workers' groups were developing by the mid-1800s leading to strikes and gradual reform through Acts of Parliament.
- \* *'Stop child labour!'* **Philanthropic reformers** such as Shaftesbury and Barnado fought for the rights of children working down mines, up chimneys, in factories or in poorhouses.
- \* *'I stand for progress, Parker.'* **The Industrial Revolution** led to major changes in transport, agriculture, manufacturing, engineering and mining, which had a huge effect on living and working conditions – at first in Britain and subsequently throughout Europe and the rest of the world.
- \* *'... railways for moving goods.'* **Railways** were of vital importance in transforming Britain into an industrialised nation. Huge numbers of workers were employed in building and running the railways, which could move people, food and manufactured goods much more quickly than horse-drawn carts and canals. People from rural areas could now travel into towns to work, and the 'seaside holiday' was born.



Topic web



\* Note: ideas marked with an asterisk are based on the wider topic rather than facts referenced in the scene.



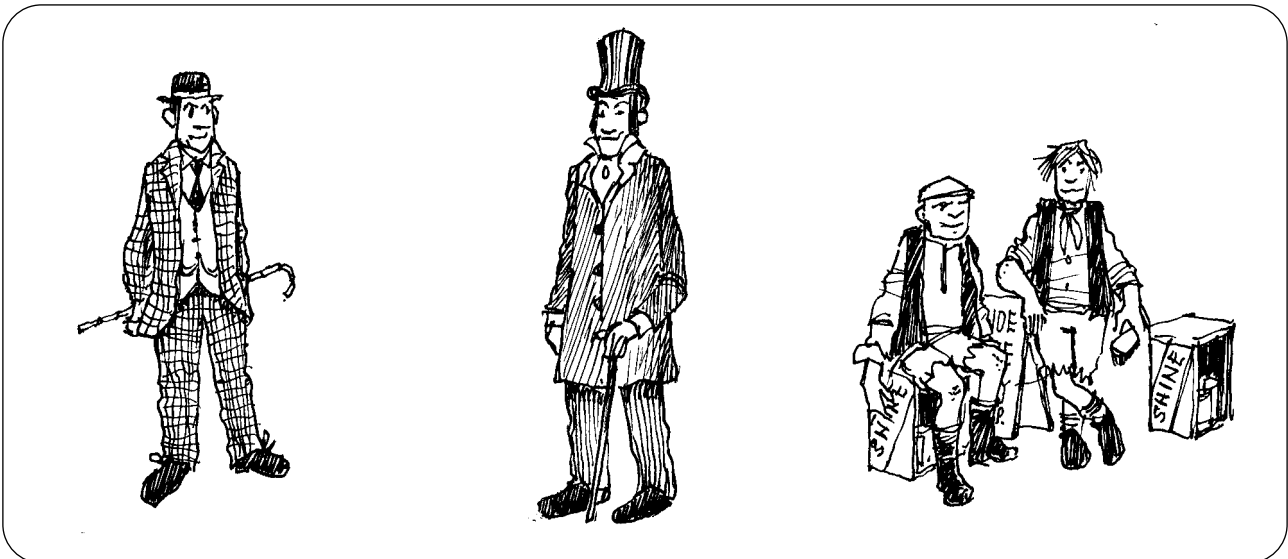
## Costume and characters



*Ellie (8 lines plus solo)*  
*Pit children (2 to 7 lines each): Dorcas, Ida, Sam, Ethel, and Tim*



*Workers (1 line each): Mr Arnold, Mr Smith, Mr Timms, Mrs France, Mrs Ward and Mrs Line*



*Manager (5 lines)*

*Mr Ramsbottom (17 lines plus solo)*

*Shoeshine boys*  
*Tom (5 lines) Harry (4 lines)*

*Percy (25 lines) Mrs Parker (6 lines) Mikey (15 lines) Blue (17 lines)*

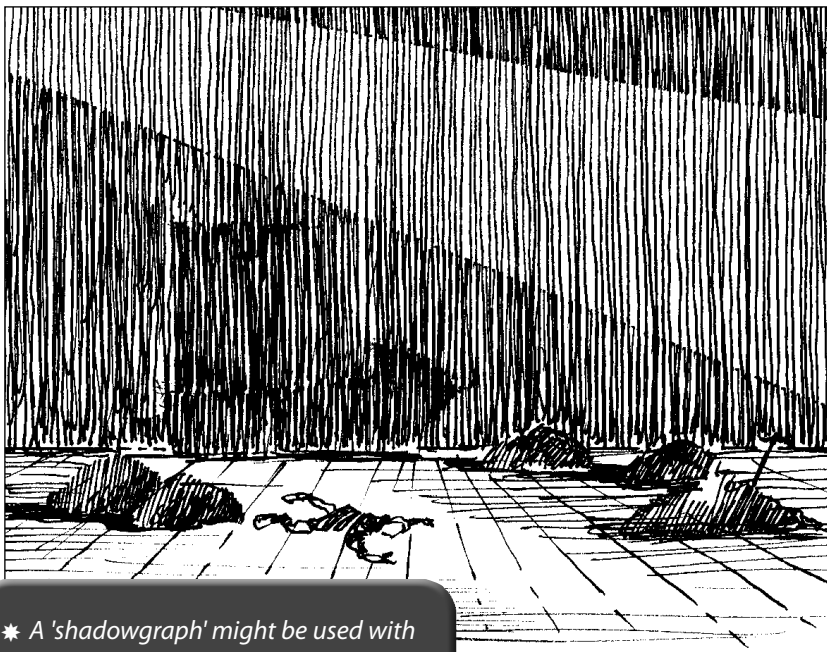


## Setting the scene

### Full-production option

The first part of this scene is set down a coal mine, the second part is a street scene. The Flying Bathtub is at the rear and is reversed so that it tends to merge into the background. It is also readily available for a very quick turn around and escape. During the set-up time the pit children enter with the sacks which are used to dress the scene, and behind which they can hide when the

time-travellers arrive. The director might wish to establish the scene by having the pit children come on and work at collecting coal, and the accident that happens to Ellie could be seen to occur, leaving her lying on the stage. As the scene changes to the street and the protest meeting, the sacks would be removed by the pit children or carried into the street scene as hand props.



\* A 'shadowgraph' might be used with the performers back-lit on to a sheet.



CD-ROM projector image:  
Coal mine backdrop



CD-ROM projector image:  
Factory backdrop

\* For the street scene perhaps a gas lamp could be held by one of the cast – even a penny-farthing bicycle brought on (loaned by the local museum). There could be a 'sandwich-man' whose boards advertise 'Stead's Penny Pies' or similar.

### Quick-and-easy option

The pit scene is created by the piles of sacks used by the pit children. The street scene uses the same space and the crowd carrying appropriate placards, sticks, and tools create the right atmosphere and picture.





## A Victorian venture

### What you'll need

#### Essential:

- \* rehearsal tracks (with vocals) – Audio CD tracks 7 and 8
- \* performance (backing) tracks and sound effects – Audio CD tracks 30 to 35.

#### Optional:

- \* backdrops, CD-ROM files: **Coal mine backdrop**, **Factory backdrop**
- \* editable script, CD-ROM file: **A Victorian venture**
- \* printable lyric sheets, CD-ROM file: **Song lyrics**.

### A coal mine – Yorkshire, 1840



CD-ROM: **Coal mine backdrop**



*Landing SFX track 30. The pit lighting (or similarly dim on-stage lighting) comes up and our TRAVELLERS come on from stage left warily, tentatively, as they feel their way along. A pile of rags lies on stage – it is ELLIE.*



*SFX track 31 (water dripping) may be repeated throughout the following scene and should be faded out before the song begins.*

BLUE           Where are we, Mr Parker?

PERCY         I'll check my timewatch – Yorkshire, 1840.

BLUE           We're in a tunnel of some kind.

MRS P         It's very dusty, Percy – just like your bedroom.

MIKEY         Watch out for the trains!

PERCY         Hecky thump! This isn't a train tunnel. This is a **mine!** We're in a coal mine!

MIKEY         You don't get many of them where you live, Violet.

BLUE           **Blue!** My name's **Blue!** Oops!

*BLUE trips against the pile of rags – ELLIE groans.*

PERCY         What is it?

BLUE           There's something here... on the ground.

MIKEY         Where?

BLUE           Here, just here. It's a filthy pile of old rags.

PERCY         Let me see... No – it's a girl.

ELLIE          *(weakly)* Don't hit me! Don't hit me! I'll move the coal in a minute.



- MRS P Who are **you**? What are you doing down **here**?
- BLUE How can anyone be so **dirty**?
- MIKEY What's your name?
- ELLIE Ellie, Ellie Goldthorpe, sir. I'm on my shift, moving coal up the line.
- PERCY How old are you, Ellie?
- ELLIE I think I'm nine, sir. I've worked here for four years.
- BLUE Working? Doing what?
- ELLIE I carry sacks of coal from the face to up there. (*points*)
- BLUE Do you do it after school?
- ELLIE What's school? (*she groans*) Ow... my leg...
- MIKEY What's happened to your leg? Can you stand up? (*trying to help her*)
- During the dialogue with ELLIE, our TRAVELLERS have been unaware that other pit children have emerged and are close to them.*
- DORCAS Don't touch her.
- ETHEL Leave her be.
- SAM **We'll** look after her.
- MIKEY She's hurt... She may need a doctor.
- DORCAS **We're** her doctor, down here.
- SAM So don't you take her.
- IDA 'Cause she's one of **us**.
- MRS P Where did you all come from?
- BLUE And how did you all get so very filthy?
- DORCAS This is a mine – a coal mine. **You'd** be filthy if you worked down here.
- MIKEY We were trying to help.
- IDA You'll take her out... And when they find she can't work, she'll be in the poorhouse.
- DORCAS Better she stays here with us.
- BLUE But it's so **horrible** and **dirty**!
- TIM So where do **you** work then, to keep so clean?
- BLUE Work? I don't work, I'm not old enough. I'm only eleven.
- TIM Ha! Eleven? And not working? Our Peter had been up chimneys for **five years** by the time he was eleven.
- BLUE Up chimneys?



- ETHEL A sweep – climbing up chimneys to clear the soot.  
 DORCAS Now that really **is** a dirty job.  
 ELLIE (*groans*)  
 MIKEY She really does need some help.  
 MRS P She needs some fresh air, poor little mite.  
 ELLIE Fresh air? Hmmm, fresh air...  
 SAM That's not for the likes of **us** – we come **down** in the dark, we **work** in the dark, we go back **up** in the dark.



Song: *SIT IN THE FLOWERS* (vocal track 7, instrumental track 32)

- ELLIE Imagine waking up one morning,  
 To find your old existence gone:  
 The walls are black, the floor is black, the roof is black, the door is black,  
 There's just a candle for the sun.  
 This is my life every day...  
 If I could only just fly away...  
 I'd sit in the flowers for a while.  
 I'd sit in the flowers for a while.  
 I'd look to the sky, I'd dream and smile,  
 I'd sit in the flowers for a while.  
 Imagine waking up one morning,  
 To find your heat and light had gone:  
 The bed is cold, the room is cold, the house is cold, the street is cold,  
 And you'll never see the sun.  
 This is our life every day...  
 If we could only just fly away...

- PIT CHILDREN We'd sit in the flowers for a while.  
 We'd sit in the flowers for a while.  
 We'd look to the sky, we'd dream and smile,  
 We'd sit in the flowers for a while.

*Ellie tries to be a part of the DANCE/MIME BREAK here with the rest of the cast, but collapses in pain.*

- ELLIE We'd look to the sky, we'd dream and smile.  
 We'd sit in the flowers for a while,  
 For a while.

*Blue takes a photo of the pit children with her mobile phone. We see a flash.*



- SAM (shouts) **Get down! Gas explosion!**  
*The miners all fall to the ground, covering their heads. After a second or two of silence, DORCAS points to a bird cage, perhaps off-stage.*
- DORCAS Useless canary. So much for an early warning.
- BLUE That wasn't an explosion! That was my mobile. Top of the range. Twelve million pixels.
- MIKEY (mimicking her) Top of the range. Twelve million pixels.
- PERCY Stop it, you two.
- ELLIE Ow! Ooh! My leg, my leg...
- PERCY We've got to get her out of here.
- DORCAS **No!** The answer's **no!**
- MIKEY Come with us – **all** of you. We'll help you all get out of here.
- TIM No, no sir – we can't leave.
- MIKEY 'Course you can – come on!
- PERCY We'll support you – we'll speak up for you.
- MRS P And I've got some lovely sausages in the Flying Bathtub.
- MIKEY Come on... I can see the light...  
*The PIT CHILDREN go off stage left. The lights come up. As the TRAVELLERS emerge from the mine into the bright daylight, they become part of a workers' protest meeting. A crowd of WORKERS enters from stage right.*

### A street

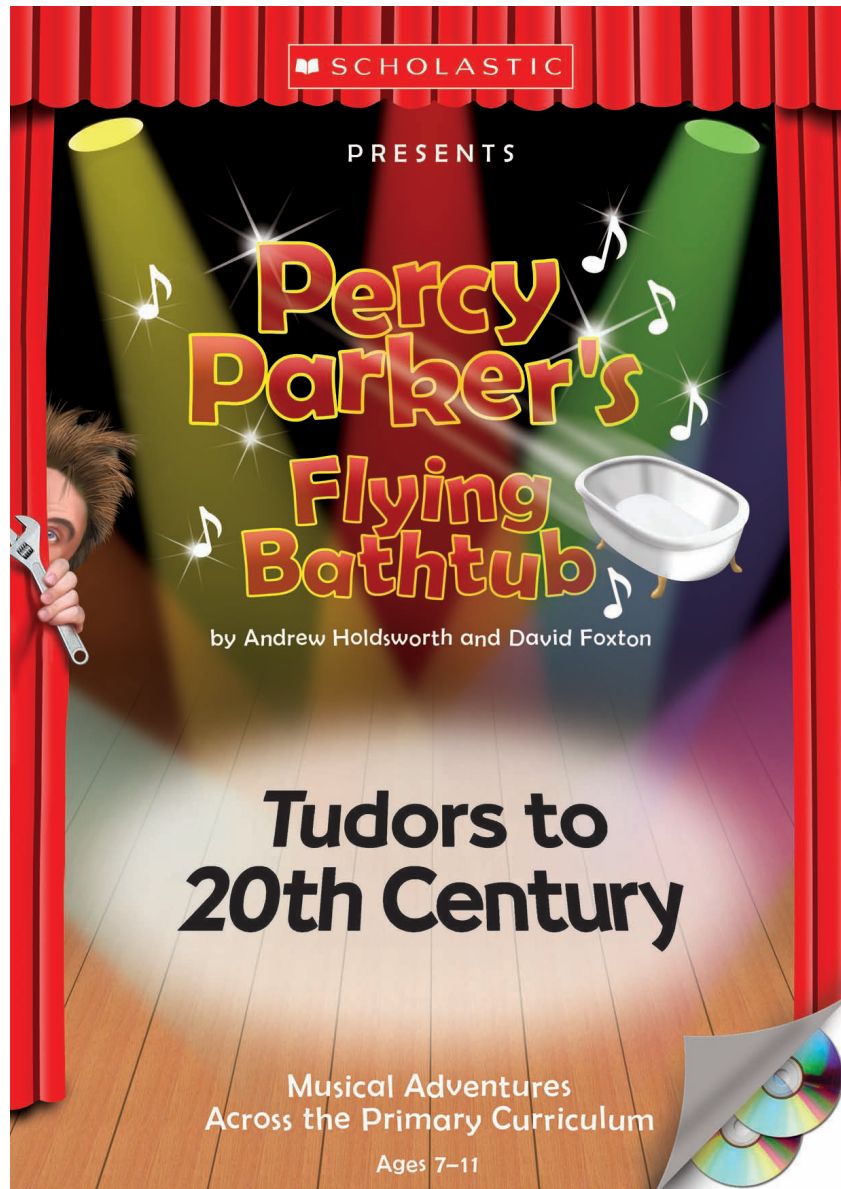


#### CD-ROM: Factory backdrop

- WORKERS (ad-lib) We deserve a better life! More pay! Shorter hours! We deserve a better life! (etc.)  
*Phrases in **bold** below may be spoken by all the WORKERS.*
- MR ARNOLD Safer factories. **We need to be safe at work!**
- MR SMITH Shorter working days. **Fewer hours at work!**
- MR TIMMS Better pay! Better conditions! **Better pay! Better conditions!**
- MRS FRANCE Stop child labour! **No more children in the pits!**
- MRS WARD Or in the factories – under the looms. **Stop child labour!**
- MRS LINE We deserve time with our families. **Rest days! Weekends off!**
- MIKEY & BLUE It's the **pits!**



Scene continued in full pack





# Sit in the Flowers

Andrew Holdsworth

A gentle ballad  $\text{♩} = 78$

G D/F# A **ELLIE** A Dm

(piano)

Im - a-gine wa-king up\_\_ one mor - ning,\_\_\_

5 G C A A/C#

to find your old ex - is-tence gone: The walls are black, the floor is black, the

8 Dm Dm/F G C C#/G# C#

roof is black, the door is black, there's just a can-dle for\_\_ the sun. This is my life ev-'ry day...

12 F#m Em A G D/F#

— If I could on-ly just fly\_\_\_ a- way... I'd sit in the flo - wers for a while.

17 A Bm G D/F# A Bm F#/A# Bm/A

I'd sit in the flo - wers for a while. I'd look to the sky, I'd dream\_\_\_ and smile,

22 Esus4 E G A C G/B D C G/B D

(flute)

— I'd sit in the flo - wers for a while. rit. a tempo

26 A Dm/A G

I - ma-gine wa-king up\_\_ one mor-ning,\_\_\_ to find your heat and light had

29 C A A/C# Dm Dm/F

gone: The bed is cold, the room is cold, the house is cold, the street is cold,

Top line music for all songs provided in full pack

