

PRECIOUS BANE

A Musical

Adapted from the novel by Mary Webb
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PRECIOUS BANE CHARACTERS

PRUE SARN is "strong as a man" and intelligent, but loving kindness-- a characteristic she shares with her meek Mother-- is the core of her nature. Born with a harelip, (cleft palate) she seems fated never to be a wife and mother. Books and Nature are her solace.

GIDEON SARN, Prue's older brother, is also intelligent as well as strong and handsome, but he pairs his father's hot temper with a ruthless strength of will. He believes that he has it in him to rise to riches and power, and intends to do it or die.

FEATURED CHARACTERS, who are also part of the Ensemble:

FATHER SARN is a fiercely proud man, filled with rage because his life is tied up in farming and fatherhood -- roles for which he has neither talent nor inclination.

MOTHER SARN is a small bright kindly bird-like woman, at a loss as to how to guide or nurture the outsize lightning-in-their-blood Sarn family she has married into.

WIZARD BEGUILDY is one of the few literate people in the parish, and though he resorts to tricks and fraud enough of his predictions come true for him to have a high opinion of his magical power and sagacity.

MISSIS BEGUILDY, as a romantic young woman, married the learned Beguildy with no glimpse of what would be in store for her as the wife of a preached-against wizard.

JANCIS BEGUILDY, a romantic like her mother, is the most beautiful girl in Shropshire. She idolizes Gideon, but her father is set on profiting from his daughter's beauty.

PREACHER is only minimally literate, and it is difficult for him to rise to his position as Christian leader of this superstitious community, but he has a good heart and tries.

MISSIS PREACHER is good-hearted too -- unless the welfare of her family is threatened. Then she will do whatever it takes to protect them.

TIVVY relishes her position as Preacher's daughter, but rebels against the meek and pious behavior people expect from her. She is sensual, scheming and selfish; a bully when she gets her way and a whiner when she doesn't.

KESTER WOODSEAVES, a strong but gentle Weaver who is new to the county, loves books and all nature's creatures. Prue gives her heart to him at first sight.

SUPPORTING CHARACTERS, doubled or tripled by Ensemble members:

HUGELET, a huge-bodied loud-mouthed bully who loves dog fighting.

GRIMBLE, a rich farmer from out past Lullingford: tight-fisted, sly and sadistic.

MISSIS GRIMBLE, a wife after Grimble's own flinty heart.

YOUNG SQUIRE CAMPERDINE and his flirtatious sister DORABELLA are Lullingford gentry, popular because they enjoy being on good terms with those beneath them.

FELINA, a sensual free spirit, and her open-minded HUSBAND tend sheep on a mountain on the far side of Lullingford.

CALLARD and MISSIS CALLARD, kindly neighbors, friends of Prue and her Mother.

SUKEY and MOLL, silly but sweet sisters ages 12 and 13.

SAMMY, Preacher's good son, has a puppy-love fondness for both Prue and Jancis.

GHOSTS, MOURNERS, TAVERN HOST, FARMERS, COOK, FARM HANDS, MAIDS, WIVES, CHILDREN, VILLAGERS, etc.... It is possible to do the show with a cast of 16, but 24 or more would be better. The more the merrier!

SETTING

The Sarn family's Shropshire freehold in the early 1800s is ancient and substantial, with woods and fields, barns, farmhouse; and a lake, Sarn Mere, whose waters are haunted by the ghosts of the drowned. Most scenes take place either in the main working/eating room of Sarn House or in the Beguildy family's neighbouring Stone House-- which is run down and disreputable, a leased farm that doubles as the Wizard's workshop. These sets must move out to clear the stage for the other main locations, which are in the open fields or in Lullingford, the nearest market town. Backdrop projections that show the landscape and its changing seasons are ideal.

Act 1, Prologue----- Listen to The Sounds of Sarn Mere

Projection of the Mere. If we could see into its deep, there is the bell tower of a drowned Church in it. Four church bells sound. Then four muffled bells, which seem to be coming from the Mere. The CHORUS sings Ah-ah-ah- from offstage.

PRUE

FOUR METAL BELLS FROM THE CHURCH YARD.
THEN FOUR DISTANT BELLS FROM THE DEEP.
IN THE WATER - THE SOUND OF A VILLAGE THAT DROWN'D -
VOICES OF THE GHOSTS WHO WAKE AND SLEEP.
DO YOU HEAR?
CAN YOU HEAR?
LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS OF SARN MERE!

This is the story of Sarn Mere, and of us who lived there-- on the banks of its haunted waters. Of Mother and my brother Gideon; and Jancis that was so beautiful; and how I learned to read and write, and if times were troublous I wrote that down, and was eased. And any merry time or good fortune, too: like the first day that I saw Kester the Weaver-- but that's not the beginning... In the beginning, I was born: hareshotten.

(VOICES only, in the dark or with projections. PRUE pictures the reaction to her twisted lip at her birth.)

MISSIS BEGUILDY's VOICE *(unseen,)*

Oh! *(shock, then recovering)* Missis Sarn-- It's a girl.

MOTHER'S VOICE *(reacting to shock)*

What? What's the matter with her?

MISSIS BEGUILDY'S VOICE

Never mind her lip, m' dear. Look at her beautiful eyes, her perfect fingers...

MOTHER'S VOICE

That lip is the Devil's mark! I should have been more careful! How could I let a hare cross my path, and mark my babe? It must've been in the night, or I've seen and chased it away. I couldn't see. Could I help it if a hare crossed my path? God forgive me.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

I'll go tell Gideon he has a sister.

MOTHER

Aye, tell him. And tell him he mun love her!

PRUE

(Takes off bonnet in light, revealing her lip to the audience)

But my affliction wasna Mother's fault, dear soul. They say one of our ancestors blasphemed against God and was struck by lightning-- and ever since we Sarns have not been like other folk.

(Projection changes to a beautiful lake ("mere") in the spring. GIDEON and JANCIS as children playing the marbles-like shell game "Conquer".)

One Sunday in May Gideon and me blasphemed again: We went out to play with Jancis instead of going to church.

(PRUE moves toward GIDEON and JANCIS, joining their game)

CHORUS *(offstage)*

BIRDS FLYING SOUTH IN THE AUTUMN

THEIR WINGS FLAPPING HIGH IN THE SKY.

WHEN SUMMER COMES AND THE WATER LILIES BLOOM -

THE SOUND OF CHILDREN'S LAUGHTER DRAWING NIGH.

DO YOU HEAR?

CAN YOU HEAR?

LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS OF SARN MERE.

GIDEON

(Overlap: hitting Jancis' snail shell and taking it for his pile)

Got you, Jancis! Inna that your last conk? I aim to Conquer all!

JANCIS *(laughing and flirting)*

So you have. Gideon the Conquerer!

GIDEON

Prue plays her conks better than you, Jancis.

JANCIS

I dunna mind. Gideon, dunna you think that I'm prettier than the lasses in Lullingford?

GIDEON

You're pretty enough, all right: dunna give yourself airs.

JANCIS

I'm near a woman grown now, and Father says I mun---

GIDEON

Your father the Wizard? He talks words of four synnables, but only a fool pays him any mind.

JANCIS (*near tears*)

I dunna mind him! Dinna I come out to play with you? Father says you were born under an ill-omened planet. He says stay away from you-- (*Jancis bursts into tears and exits*)

GIDEON

Run away home, then, crybaby! Prue, set down your conks. I'll be King O' the Hill!

PRUE

Gideon, we mun go.

GIDEON

The church bells hanna rung yet.

PRUE

They have! I heard them, and the ghost bells, too! We're terrible late, and Father will have his whip out--

GIDEON (*picks up Conks and sets out for home*)

Dunna be worrit. Tivvy told me Preacher's sermon was to be Adam and Eve, and I can give Father the tale of it— And if he doesna believe me, I'll stand up to him! I've had enough of his whip. I'm near a man, now: tall as him, and past cringing--

PRUE (*downstage, to audience*)

Gideon did defy him! As I hurried to catch up, I heard my father's shouts of anger, and the crack of his whip! And then— no sounds but mother whimpering in fright and then sobbing in sorrow.

MOTHER'S VOICE

Gideon, no! Oh, dunna, Sarn!-- Hold thy hand! Gideon!
Sarn, O Sarn, poor soul, come to thyself!

PRUE (*calling*)

Gideon, what have you done?

GIDEON (*coming downstage to to Prue*)

Father's dead of an apoplexy, and there's no help for it. I'll go see all's safe with Mother, and the beasts in their housen. Tomorrow we mun have black ribbons for mourning, and a deal to do for the funeral.

Funeral --- the woods at night.

Church bells. The MOURNERS enter with torches in a funeral procession, singing a HYMN. In the distance we heard the hooves and snorts of oxen pulling the coffin wagon, but now the MOURNERS have taken up the coffin and are hauling it towards the grave.)

ENSEMBLE

WITHE A TURF ALL AT YOUR HEAD DEAR MAN,
AND ANOTHER AT YOUR FEET,
YOUR GOOD DEEDS AND YOUR BAD ONES ALL
BEFORE THE LORD SHALL MEET.

MOTHER brings up a big pewter tankard of elderberry wine, and PRUE offers refreshment to the MOURNERS who are comforting Mother. #1 & #2 slip downstage to gossip... TIVVY, JANCIS, MISSIS B, and MISSIS PREACHER focus on Gideon and his new status.

MOURNER #1

The poor man died with his boots on. They say it was his heart.

MOURNER #2

His heart? No! His son Gideon killed him. Young Sarn has a temper hot as his father's-- it's in the Sarn blood, like the lightning. His sister's, too. Grimble told me when Prue Sarn was no more than five years old she cast her Evil Eye on his sheep, and they come down with foot rot!

MOURNER #1

The Sarn girl do have the Devil's mark.....

(As MOURNERS 1 and 2 sing "Harehotten", the rest sing a reprise of "With a Turf", in counterpoint.)

MOURNER #1, then MOURNER #2

SHE IS HARESHOTTEN! HARESHOTTEN!

MOURNERS #1 AND #2

HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN.

MOURNER #1

WHAT A SIGHT!

MOURNERS #1 AND #2

TAKE FRIGHT! TAKE FRIGHT!

WHAT A SIGHT. TAKE FRIGHT!

SHE WILL BLIGHT YOU WITH HER EVIL EYE!

JANCIS notices them making the evil eye sign against the SARNS and points it out to MISSIS B and MISSIS PREACHER, who look reproachful.

MOURNER #!

Best not speak ill of his children. Least, not till he's laid fast in ground and turfed over!

MISSIS BEGUILDY (*crossing to #1 & #2*)

Prue Sarn's a good girl, twisted lip and all. None I know with a better heart.

MOURNER #2 (*to MISSIS B, but for MISSIS PREACHER*)

You're a fine one to speak for a hareshotten maid -- you the wife to a preached-against Wizard! I wonder you dare show your face at a Christian burial. The Bible says what we mun do with witches and wizards.

MISSIS PREACHER

Bible also says "shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

(Preacher clears his throat to summon the mourners)

MOURNER #1 (*quieting #2*)

Hush, now! Show respect.

PREACHER

Be there a Sin Eater?

MOTHER

Gideon, where's the Sin Eater? I asked you to send for him.

GIDEON

I wasna willing to pay for one. I dunna see the sense in it.

MOTHER

But, Gideon! Your father left this life with all his sins upon him. In his boots, poor soul! Some-one mun do this for him.

GIDEON

I'll do it.

MOTHER

No, Gideon! Sin Eaters be accurst!

JANCIS

Gideon, dunna take the sins!

GIDEON

What harm can there be in drinking a sip of your own wine and chewing a crust of your own bread? But if you don't wish it, Mother, let it be. He can go with the sin on him.

MOTHER

No! Give him rest! If there's no one else, let his own lad take pity.

GIDEON

If I do, mother, will you give me the farm?

MOTHER

Yes, yes, my dear! What is the farm to me? You can take all, and welcome.

GIDEON (*holds up bread to eat*)

I TAKE THE SINS OF MY FATHER,
MY FATHER, MAY HE REST IN PEACE. (EATS)

PREACHER

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.

PRUE & MOTHER

MAY HE REST IN PEACE.

ALL MOURNERS

HE TAKES THE SINS OF HIS FATHER,
HIS FATHER, MAY HE REST IN PEACE.

PREACHER, then MOURNERS

MAY HE REST IN PEACE. MAY HE REST IN PEACE.

(*GIDEON next drinks the wine. They sing in a round:*)

GIDEON AND MOURNERS

I DRINK (HE DRINKS) THE SINS OF HIS FATHER
MY (HIS) FATHER, MAY HE REST IN PEACE. MAY HE REST IN PEACE.

PREACHER AND MOURNERS

AND MAY WE RISE. AND MAY WE RISE.
AND MAY WE RISE PRUE AND MAY WE RISE.

ALL:

AND MAY WE ALL RISE AT THE RESURECTION
AND TAKE ON ETERNAL LIFE.

The MOURNERS douse their torches and go off. JANCIS goes off with GIDEON. PRUE is left alone on stage to sing her thoughts.

PRUE

AND WHEN WE RISE FROM DEATH'S LAST SLEEP -
WILL WE OUR EARTHLY BODIES KEEP?
IN HEAVEN, WILL MOTHER HAVE THE SAME SMILE OF FEAR?
WILL ANGER STILL FILL MY FATHER?
AS WE DIED, SHALL WE BIDE?
OR MAY WE WEAVE OUR BODIES TO OUR VERY OWN LIKING
OUT OF THE SPINNING OF OUR SOULS -
OUT OF THE SPINNING OF MY SOUL -
AND BE BORN INTO BEAUTY
TO MATCH OUR HEARTS' LOVING
AND ALL OUR INJURIES MADE WHOLE

(Scene fades as the backdrop brightens to dawn.)

- Dawn in the Green Meadow, May

GIDEON and PRUE take off their funeral blacks, revealing work clothes beneath. Segue into the next scene, PRUE "picking daisies".

GIDEON

Things are going to be different from now on, Prue.

PRUE *(braiding a daisy crown)*

You mean now that father's dead? 'Tis a sad thing, his body to be in ground, and Mother afeared that his spirit will come looking for it--

GIDEON *(sits PRUE on a stump to persuade her to help his Plan)*

Mother's always afeared! What I mean is, you and me have got to get on.

PRUE *(listens and braids daisies)*

And Mother, too.

GIDEON

If we get on, mother will. The farm is mine now and I mean to do something with it!

I SHALL WORK THIS LAND, EVERY FIELD IN SIGHT.
I SHALL PLOUGH BY DAY. I SHALL PLOUGH BY NIGHT.
AND WITH CORN PRICES RISING IT IS CORN I SHALL GROW.
CORN IN THE RICK YARD, AND IN THE WOODS BELOW.
WILL YOU HELP ME, PRUE? DO WHAT I MEAN TO DO?

I want to make a mort of money. Then, we'll sell the farm and start a new life.

PRUE

But--! There's always been Sarns at Sarn! It's gold you want? The root of evil? Dunna you care for the land, lad?

GIDEON

I don't care a damn for the land. Nor even for the money, as such. What I want is to get m' teeth into something hard and chaw it. To play Conquer till there isn't a conk left but mine. To be King-o'the-walk, and the only apple on the bough!

I SHALL BUY A HOUSE HIGH UP ON A HILL
AND THE WHOLE DAMN TOWN WILL BE BENDIN' TO MY WILL.
I SHALL BE CHURCH WARDEN WITH A CHAIN FULL OF LOCKS,
SAY WHO'S GOIN' TO THE ALMSHOUSE
AND WHO'S GOIN' TO THE STOCKS.
WILL YOU HELP ME, PRUE? DO WHAT I MEAN TO DO?
WILL Y' PRUE?

PRUE

What about Jancis, Gideon? Don't you mean to marry her?

GIDEON (*chuckles*)

I'll take her to the gentry's Hunt Ball, in a rich silk gown.

I NEVER THOUGHT I COULD HAVE IT ALL –
A WIFE, AND MONEY TOO:
BUT WITH YOUR HELP IT COULD ALL WORK OUT
JUST THE WAY I WANT IT, PRUE!

(he crowns PRUE with the flowers)

Don't you want to be a rich lady?

YOU SHALL HAVE NEW CHINA AND SILVERWARE TOO.

GOWNS A -PLENTY THAT WERE MADE JUST FOR YOU.
ANY WENCH THAT HAS A BABY OUT OF WEDLOCK YOU SHALL SCOLD.
THAT'S THE PRIVILEGE OF PROSPERITY AND THE POWER OF GOLD!

PRUE

Scold her? I'd just as leif play with the baby!

GIDEON

Anybody can play with a baby. None but a great lady can scold.

PRUE

But Gideon,—

GIDEON

I CAN DO WHAT I'VE A MIND TO. I'VE GOT A POWER IN ME PRUE!

PRUE

PEOPLE SAY THAT ALL THE SARNS HAVE LIGHTNING IN THEIR BLOOD!

GIDEON

Lightning? I've a power so strong, that nought but death can bind it!

AND WITH YOU TO HELP ME —

PRUE

I shall help you as long as I can, Gideon, but —One day I hope to be married: with a place of my own -- and children.

GIDEON *(takes off her crown and hands it to her)*

You shouldn't count on that, Prue. I'm afeared nobody'll ask you.

PRUE

You shouldna say that to me, Gideon! You don't know what may be.

GIDEON

Round here people know you, and dunna mind. But folk say your lip's a curse of bad luck, and it'd take a bold man to--! I'm main sorry for you, Prue. I'd as lief I were the one. With a beard, none would think the worse of me. But a girl-- You see, now, don't you?

PRUE *(bitter)*

I see. *(music stops)*

GIDEON

Then you'll do as I say? I mun fetch the Bible for you to swear it!

PRUE

They say we Sarns are all cursed in some way. The lightning-- *(puts her hand to her lips.)*

WILL THIS BE THE CURSE OF MY LIFE?

I FEARED IT WOULD.

BUT PRAYED T'WOULD NOT BE SO.

(A grouse makes a cackling sound from the trees above.)

PRUE

Be quiet you old grouse. Are you laughing at me? Or-- perhaps the world has not been kind to you, and you find an ill humor in it. Well go ahead and laugh, then. I won't stop you!

LAUGH! LAUGH!

LAUGH THOUGH THE JOKE BE FULL OF PAIN!

LAUGH WHEN THE TRUTH YOU PUSH FROM SIGHT

BURSTS UPON YOU LIKE A BLIGHT –

AND YOU CAN'T ESCAPE ITS UGLINESS.

THOSE BE THE WAYS THE GROUSE LAUGH.

THEY RISE UP FROM THE BITTER MARSH –

AND FLY BETWEEN THE WITHERED SAGE AND FREEZING RAIN –AND LAUGH!

LAUGH! LAUGH! LAUGH AT THE WICKEDNESS OF FATE!

LAUGH WITH A LAUGHTER HARSH AND WILD

WHEN A WOMAN BIG WITH CHILD

SEES THE HARE THAT RUNS ACROSS HER PATH.

THOSE BE THE WAYS THE GROUSE LAUGH.

THEY RISE UP FROM THE BITTER MARSH –

AND FLY BETWEEN THE WITHERED SAGE AND FREEZING RAIN –AND LAUGH!

WHY DO YOU SING SUCH A SOUR TUNE?

WHAT DREAM OF YOURS WENT ASTRAY?

DID GOD BEGRUDGE YOU A PRETTY VOICE?

OR DID THE DEVIL DRIVE IT, AND GET HIS WAY?

LAUGH! LAUGH! LAUGH! MUST I LEARN TO LAUGH LIKE YOU?

YOURS IS A LAUGH THAT NEVER SINGS –

IT'S A CRUEL LAUGH THAT SPRINGS

FROM A HEART THAT'S FULL OF BITTERNESS.

I DUNNA' WANT TO LAUGH LIKE YOU LAUGH.

IF I CANNA' HAVE A LOVER,
THEN THE WORLD IN ALL ITS BEAUTY I'LL EMBRACE.
AND IF THE WORLD WILL HAVE ME –
I'LL LAUGH AGAIN – WITH GRACE!

GIDEON (*returns with the Bible.*)

I've thought of something else, Prue. It'd be well if one of us could read and write and keep the accounts.

PRUE

I'll learn! Beguildy can teach me! I'll help you with the accounts, and learn cures, too.

GIDEON

Take lessons from that evil Wizard? You dunna believe in his magic.....

PRUE

Not his tricks. But Beguildy has books of healing plants, and cures. When I can write biddings and letters, and cure what ails them, people will pay me money.

GIDEON

Beguildy will want to be paid to learn you.

PRUE

I'll pay in work. Beguildy's lazy, and he canna plough like I can.

GIDEON

We mun swear on the Bible.

PRUE

Mun we ask Mother first? About the farm and all?

GIDEON

The farm is mine. I took Father's sins upon me! Hold the book and swear:

(Gideon begins, and Prue sings the same text and tune one phrase behind him, in canon)

I VOW TO OBEY MY BROTHER, GIDEON SARN
TO WORK FOR HIM AS A SERVANT, UNTIL ALL THAT HE WILLS BE DONE.
I WILL TAKE NO MONEY-
AND BE AS BIDDABLE AS A PRENTICE, WIFE, OR DOG.

And I, Gideon, swear to keep faith: and share, when we've come through.

AND THIS WE SWEAR ON THE HOLY BIBLE. AMEN.

(PRUE shivers and puts her hand on her heart.)

GIDEON

What ails you?

PRUE

We forgot to tell the rooks about father's death! You know what they say – if we don't tell the rooks, they forget to come home. It would be unlucky.

GIDEON

You're right, Prue. Let's tell 'em.

(They walk toward "a big elm tree where the rooks are nesting" and GIDEON shouts up to them.)

Ho, rooks! Father's dead, and I am Master now. I've come to say you can keep your house in peace, and you're kindly welcome to stay.

PRUE

Look, Gideon, they're flying up into the sky. They're -- they're thinking it over? Oh, look! Now they're coming back! I think they mean to stay!

GIDEON

I'm right glad of it. 'Cause I sure am fond of rooky-pie!

Beguildy's Stone House, Day

In an inner room TIVVY is heard coughing and whimpering.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

DIGGING FOR A PLANT THAT IS GROWING IN THE SWAMP,
I'M IN MUD UP TO MY KNEES AND I'M WETTED THROUGH AND THROUGH.
I'M A MISERABLE MESS CAUSE I'M DOING WHAT YOU WANT--
'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT A WIZARD'S WIFE MUST DO!
WHEN THE PLANT IS DUG I MUST PUT IT IN A JUG
WITH HORSE PISS AND A BUG, AND SHAKE TILL IT TURNS BLUE
IT DOESN'T MAKE SENSE! BUT SENSE IS NO DEFENCE!
'CAUSE THAT'S WHAT A WIZARD'S WIFE MUST DO!

(MISSIS gives jug to BEGUILDY. JANCIS enters with dead rooster)

WIZARD BEGUILDY *(off)*

Where's me gizzard?

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Hold your horses! Jancis! *(takes rooster, slaps it onto cutting board)*
You've gone and kilt a rooster! Your father wants a particolored hen. He's like to be burstin'
through the roof!

JANCIS *(amazed)*

He's got a flying charm, now?!

MISSIS BEGUILDY *(Chops off rooster's head)*

No such thing, more's the pity. Well, no need for him to know! *(To BEGUILDY, off)* Here's yer
fresh gizzard.

TIVVY *(off, screams)*

O, no! Aarrgh! *(TIVVY tries to escape, Missis B & Beguildy push her back inside)*

MISSIS BEGUILDY

You see that string of roasted onions round Tivvy's neck? I'm sure I cried quarts getting 'em
ready. All Tivvy needs is a treacle tonic. Your father and his charms.....

I'D TRADE ALL THE BLESSINGS,
DEFY EVERY CURSE,
FOR A FEW STRAIGHT ANSWERS
AND AN HONEST DAY'S WORK!
FOR A WIZARD, WHAT COULD BE WORSE?

(PRUE enters carrying a bunch of flowers)

JANCIS

Here be Prue! She has ringlets! Prue! Wouldna I look fine in ringlets?

PRUE

You look fine as you are, Jancis. *(to Missis B)* I brought you flowers.....

JANCIS *(snatching flowers)*

I'll braid a crown for my hair!

PRUE *(to Missis B)*

Inna Mister Beguildy here?

MISSIS BEGUILDY *(in a flurry of feathers, points)*

He's curing Tivvy's chin cough. Did you hear tell the news from Lullingford?

BEGUILDY (*enters*)

I heard tell as the Devil was dead! But it inna true, Prue: for I met him yestere'en, and right pleased he was to have your Father's company!

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Now, hush, m'dear. Did you hear, Prue? Poor drown-ed John Woodseaves's nephew is finished with his apprenticeship, and taking up his uncle's cottage and weaving trade in Lullingford!

BEGUILDY

I heard. An owl told me.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

So you say, m'dear.

BEGUILDY

Weaver's nephew's name is Kester Woodseaves.

TIVVY (*garlanded in onions, weeping & coughing*)

I seed him! On the road, a-Sunday. A fine figure of a man, he is. (*they are surprised*)
When he smiles he's as handsome as Gideon!

BEGUILDY

Get back and lie down! 'Ware the charm's revers-ed, and you cough to death!
(*TIVVY scoots, wailing*)

MISSIS BEGUILDY

A fine trade, Weaver. It'd be better, a power, if you took that sort of job, m'dear.

BEGUILDY

Canna I bless, and curse? Canna I cure warts, and foretell the future?

MISSIS BEGUILDY

So you say.

PRUE

Mister Beguildy! I want you to learn me to read and sum. To write the big Bible words, and everything you know! Gideon and me's going to be rich, and have a house and servants. I'll pay you in work. I plough as fine a furrow as Gideon. Or nearly.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

You want to write? Even Tivvy canna write, and she's Preacher's daughter.

BEGUILDY

Preacher's daughter could write and more, were she clever enough to come to me. It's a world of fools! Woman! I need some May butter.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

We sell every morsel of butter, almost afore it be out of the churn! I've summat better to think of. Prue's brother Gideon's getting particular with Jancis. I predict a handfasting—

BEGUILDY

I tell you, young Sarn was born under a planet that'll never keep money! Sleeps on his face, too. Them as does that dies a-drownding. Jancis is not for Sarn. Why, no squire-- nor lord even--! but would take it kindly to take her to his bed.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

But not to marry her.

BEGUILDY (*dragging TIVVY out*)

What of it? They'd pay, wouldn't they? (*JANCIS is crying with TIVVY now*) Hush your noise, Tivvy. You mun rest quiet till you're cured!

MISSIS BEGUILDY (*quieting Jancis*)

Hush now too, Jancis. When Gideon and you be handfasted, Kester the new Weaver will come for a love spinning and make up all that's spun into bride-cloth. We'll have a caking "Do", too.

BEGUILDY

Let our neighbours play bride-party games, we'll welcome their money. But I don't give Jancis my consent, and I won't write out biddings for you.

TIVVY

I love a Do. Can I come?

JANCIS

You mun come, Tivvy. Soon as Prue's learned to write, she'll ink you a proper bidding.

BEGUILDY

For Prue's first lesson, we'll write down that you're all a parcel of fools. I foresee a young Squire for Jancis: one with his pockets full of gold.

PRUE

I'd rather write "Whom God hath joined together let not Man put asunder."

BEGUILDY

Clever wench. But you'll not get the better of me. Riches and servants you say, Prue? Slow down, not so fast.

SADDLE YOUR DREAMS BEFORE YOU RIDE 'EM,
SADDLE YOUR DREAMS, SADDLE YOUR DREAMS.
START OFF ALL WILD, YOU'LL FALL BEHIND 'EM.
SADDLE YOUR DREAMS, SADDLE YOUR DREAMS.
HEED WHAT I SAY AND DON'T YOU BE ARGU-LING.
DON'T EXPECT ANSWERS. DON'T ASK ME WHY.
A WORD TO THE WISE, AND NONE OF YOUR BARGU-LING.
MIGHT AS WELL QUESTION THE SUN IN THE SKY!
BORN ON THE BREEZE, WRIT IN THE TREES.
YOU MUN FIND THE MEANING, AND WILL IF YOU TRY.

TIVVY (*enters again, coughing and howling.*)

Mister Beguildy!

BEGUILDY

Go back in. You're not cured yet. (*TIVVYcomplies*) Without butter takes longer.

MISSIS B

Thank heavens Jancis wants a hard-working lad like Gideon. Any man, but a Wizard!

HOW DID I COME TO BE A WIZARD'S WIFE?
A WIZARD IS BONE LAZY AND SMUG!
WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH A WIZARD'S LIFE?
THAT HE CAN'T CATCH HIS OWN SNAKE OR BUG!
OUT AT MIDNIGHT, DIGGING UP MANDRAKE.
CHILLS DOWN MY SPINE, AND AGUE IN MY KNEES.
TOE OF FROG, IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE MY HANDS SHAKE.
MULBERRY ROOT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE ME WHEEZE!

BEGUILDY

You be above yourself, woman. You think to see our Jancis wedded and bedded and rounding to a grandchild all in a lantunpuff. But I tell you, not every bridegroom takes his virgin, and I dunna like the match!

SADDLE YOUR DREAMS BEFORE YOU RIDE 'EM.

JANCIS

DREAMING OF RINGLETS.

JANCIS & MISSIS BEGUILDY

RINGLETS OF GOLD!

BEGUILDY

START OFF ALL WILD, YOU'LL FALL BEHIND 'EM.

JANCIS

DECKED OUT IN RINGLETS -

MISSIS BEGUILDY

A SIGHT TO BEHOLD! (*JANCIS & MISSIS B DANCE TOGETHER*)

JANCIS

GIDEON WILL SEE WHAT HE HAS IN ME.
SHINING LIKE AN ANGEL! -- OR SO I'VE BEEN TOLD.

BEGUILDY

If Prue here is ready to work hard for us, I'll take her on as my scholar.

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Will your headpiece stand it, child?

BEGUILDY

Ah, Prue's headpiece be right enough, though there be too many questions in it.

BEGUILDY

SADDLE YOUR DREAMS BEFORE YOU RIDE 'EM.

PRUE

WHEN CAN WE START? I'M ON THE BRINK!

BEGUILDY

START OFF ALL WILD, YOU'LL FALL BEHIND 'EM.

PRUE

I'LL LEARN TO READ, AND WRITE WHAT I THINK!
READING THE BIBLE AND WORDS OF THE WISE
OPENING WINDOWS, OPENING MY EYES!
I'LL LIVE A HUNDRED LIVES,
OF QUEENS AND CATS AND WIVES.
I'LL GO TO A PLACE WHERE I'M GREETED WITH SMILES.
I'LL GO TEN THOUSAND MILES!

JANCIS

I'M RIPE AS A PEACH.

PRUE

I'M READY TO LEARN!

BEGUILDY

SHE WANTS ME TO TEACH –

JANCIS

I'LL MAKE HIS HEAD TURN –
WITH RINGLETS OF GOLD-

MISSIS BEGUILDY

AND SOON A BABY TO HOLD-

JANCIS

I'M A FLOWER READY TO BLOOM.
GIVE ME SUNSHINE, GIVE ME ROOM!

BEGUILDY

SADDLE YOUR DREAMS

MISSIS BEGUILDY

AND A GRANDCHILD WOULD BE SWEET.
IT WOULD MAKE MY LIFE COMPLETE.

BEGUILDY

SADDLE YOUR DREAMS.

PRUE

EVERY WORD WILL SHED NEW LIGHT –
ALL MY DREAMS WILL THEN TAKE FLIGHT!

BEGUILDY

SADDLE YOUR DREAMS.

(TIVVY enters, crosses, trying to sneak out.)

BEGUILDY

HEED WHAT I SAY AND DON'T YOU BE ARGULING.
DON'T EXPECT ANSWERS, DON'T ASK ME WHY.

MISSIS BEGUILDY *(grabbing hold of TIVVY, to her husband.)*

A WORD TO THE WISE, AND NONE OF YOUR BARGULING.
IF YOU WANT TO SUCCEED -
THEN BRIDLE YOUR STEED -
AND SADDLE YOUR DREAMS!

(MISSIS BEGUILDY gives TIVVY a big push. The scene ends in a flurry of slapstick and crashes of pots and magical props.)

ALL WOMEN
SADDLE YOUR DREAMS!

In the fields

(GIDEON is working. PRUE comes running out to him)

PRUE

Gideon, Beguildy says he'll teach me, in exchange for ploughing!

GIDEON

Good. And you mun learn to make cheese to sell at market. When our sow farrows, we'll keep the piglets, and Mother can mind them--

PRUE

But Mother canna abide pigs!

GIDEON

We'll have a deal of bacon. I mean to work you and Mother, Prue, but I won't clem 'ye. Good plain food. Fruit when it's aplenty: butter when the roads are too bad for market.

PRUE

I shall put up a prayer for bad roads.

GIDEON

All right, but it'll take the Devil's own weather to stop me!

(GIDEON works. A passage of time is indicated by the ENSEMBLE.)

ENSEMBLE TURN, TURN, THE SEASONS TURN,
THE CHILDREN SPORT AND PLAY.
BUT THE PLOUGHMAN'S FIRST TO FEEL THE WIND
AND THE SUN AT THE BREAK OF DAY.
HIS HANDS ARE SORE AND CALLOUSED.
HE KEEPS THEM STRAIGHT IN LINE.
HIS EYE IS SURE AND STEADY,
HIS TEAM WELL-MATCHED AND FINE.

FARMER 1

That boy Gideon drives the straightest furrow I ever saw!

FARMER 2

Whatever he does, it's as if his life was on it!

PRUE *(enters, waving a newspaper)*

Look, Gideon! What you've been wishing for! They've raised the price of corn.

GIDEON

I knew it would happen, but I never thought so soon!

PRUE

Soon? It's been four years since Father died.

GIDEON

We've done well. But we must get more land under corn, plough twice as much, Prue.

MOTHER *(coming to them from the pigs)*

But Gideon, the girl's already grown lanky as a clothes prop from so much work. Do you want her to look like a bulrush in the mere?

(GIDEON, PRUE and MOTHER go off. The ENSEMBLE'S choreographed movement expresses the passage towards Spring.)

ENSEMBLE

TURN, TURN, FOREVER TURN; THE WORK IS NEVER DONE.
THE FARMER AND HIS WOMEN FOLK, WORK TILL SET OF SUN.
THE EARTH IS HARD AND FROSTY, A MIST COMES FROM THE SEA.
THE OPEN SKY ABOVE US, THE GULLS FOR COMPANY
TURN, TURN, FOREVER TURN. WE SCATTER AND WE SOW
AND WITH GOD'S HELP AND PLENTY OF SUN, THE SEEDS WILL SURELY GROW.
THE SEEDS WILL SURELY GROW.

PRUE

Gideon! Come thy ways in to supper. The moon's setting down behind the church croft.

GIDEON

By gum, you look pale as a ghost. Did you pen the fowl up ? No? Be quick about it, then; it should ha' been done this hour. Locked the traps?

PRUE

No. I thought you would.

GIDEON

When I'm mowing, I canna do aught else, saving the jobs that are too heavy for you.

PRUE

There be na' many of those.

GIDEON

When you've done the fowl and the traps, you can set a two-three fish-lines in the Mere. I've got some sawing to do yet.

PRUE *(at the limit of her strength)*

It'll take a terrible long while, and I'm no good at setting fish lines.

GIDEON

Did you make a vow, or dinna you? *(PRUE nods assent)* Then abide by it. It won't be forever, Prue. You mun go with me to Lullingford. You'll lend a hand with buying and selling, and I want to show you something-- a house I've set my mind on.

PRUE

A house!

GIDEON

Don't tell anyone, or the price might go double. *(GIDEON goes off.)*

PRUE

WE WORK AS THE SEASONS TURN, FROM DAWN TO RISE OF MOON
I JOY TO SEE THE BARLEY GROW, AND SING A HAPPY TUNE

ENSEMBLE

AND NOW THE YOKING'S OVER, THE LONG DAY'S WORK IS DONE
THE OXEN ARE BUT SHADOWS IN THE WANING OF THE SUN.

LULLINGFORD MARKET DAY

(Fiery dawn near Christmas, then sun up, changing scene to Lullingford. PRUE, happy and laughing, and GIDEON enter in traveling clothes, carrying market goods. The TOWNSFOLK are setting up their goods for market.)

GIDEON

I wish Jancis had come with us.

PRUE

And so she shall, one day!

GIDEON

Wizard Beguildy hates me. He wilna let her.

PRUE *(laughing, raucous and loud)*

Oh, Beguildy! I'll wile 'un with his own spells and charm him with his own charms!

GIDEON

Husht now, lass! Laugh quiet. Not like a wild curlew.

PRUE

But a curlew's good company. I'm pleased with the compliment, lad. And I'm pleased with Lullingford. *(People enter, headed to their Lullingford marketing, greeting.)*

ENSEMBLE

LULLINGFORD,
SO BRIGHT AND SO BOUNTIFUL
THE BAKERY'S PERFUME ON THE AIR
THE GROCERY'S DELECTABLE
THE PEOPLE RESPECTABLE

PRUE

WITH SMILES ON THEIR FACES
AS THEY GATHER FOR THE FAIR!

GIDEON

Girl, you bin raving!

PRUE

THE BLACKSMITH'S SPARKS GO UP WITH A ROAR!
I'D LIKE TO LINGER, I'D LIKE TO EXPLORE -
EVERY GARDEN, EVERY LANE -

O, HOW CAN I EXPLAIN? A TOWN WITHOUT PAIN.

(GIDEON sees DORABELLA and YOUNG SQUIRE CAMPERDINE approaching on their way to the tavern, and grins lecherously.)

GIDEON

AND EVERYTHING TO GAIN!

(PRUE turns toward cottage, missing the look of mutual attraction that passes between the richly dressed flirtatious DORABELLA and GIDEON. As DORABELLA goes by she drops her handkerchief.)

PRUE *(absorbed in a domestic fantasy)*

BUT THE WEAVER'S COTTAGE I LIKE BEST OF ALL.

IT'S VINE SO RICH WITH GRAPES IN THE FALL

THE ROSES BLOOM SO FREELY THAT THEY GARLAND ROUND THE DOOR

AND I DOUBT IF HEAVEN COULD OFFER ME MORE!

GIDEON *(picks up handkerchief)*

Miss Dorabella! Be you missing summat that I have?

DORABELLA

An' if I am, Sarn? *(snatches her handkerchief and hurries off again)*

PRUE *(coming to GIDEON)*

Who was that lady, Gideon?

GIDEON

Miss Dorabella Camperdine, old Squire Camperdine's niece. That high-born hussy throws me saucy looks pret'near every market day.

GIDEON

LULLINGFORD,

SO PLUMP AND SO PROSPEROUS

THE SCENT OF SUCCESS IN THE AIR!

THE LADIES WHO SMILE AT ME

THEIR GLANCES SO FANCY-FREE

AS IF THEY WERE SAYING – COME AND GET ME, IF YOU DARE!

GIDEON *(shows PRUE the money they've earned.)*

We've done well. Let's go to the Mug O' Cider. I'll treat you to a drink and sup.

(As they pack up their things, the lights fade on PRUE and GIDEON and come up on a group standing outside the tavern.)

TAVERN HOST

A toast to the Young Squire!

TAVERN CUSTOMERS

May he drink in good health!

(As PRUE and GIDEON approach the outside of the tavern, the PEOPLE freeze and stare at PRUE in silence. PRUE realizes her bonnet is not hiding her face and turns away from them.)

PRUE *(aside)*

They're staring at my face. Why do they hate me? I've done them no harm!

TAVERN HOST

Dunna look upon her. You'll dwine and dwindle away!

TAVERN CUSTOMERS

HARE-SHOTTEN! HARE-SHOTTEN!
HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN!
DUNNA DRINK! DUNNA DRINK!
DUNNA LET HER COME NIGH.

MEN

HARESHOTTEN!
HARESHOTTEN!
HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN!
DUNNA DRINK!
DUNNA DRINK!
DUNNA LET HER COME NIGH.
DUNNA LET HER COME NIGH.

WOMEN

HARESHOTTEN!
HARESHOTTEN
HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN!
DUNNA DRINK!
DUNNA DRINK!
DUNNA LET HER COME NIGH.
DUNNA LET HER COME NIGH.

MEN AND WOMEN ALTERNATE

NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!

ALL CUSTOMERS

NO, SHE'LL POISON YER INNARDS. BLIGHT YOU WITH HER EVIL EYE.

MEN

HARESHOTTEN! HARESHOTTEN!

ALL (*whispered*)

HARESHOTTEN!

DORABELLA

Host! Who's the woman with the twisted lip?

TAVERN HOST

Shh..! She's with Sarn.

DORABELLA (*to GIDEON as he brings mug to PRUE*)

Young Sarn! (*shakes hands*) There's to be an election soon, and Father's got some work for you. Best come and see us and take drink and sup-- if your sweetheart can spare you.

GIDEON

I'd like to talk to Squire, but I've much to do at Sarn these days. What with the weather...

DORABELLA (*laughs scornfully*)

So! You've no time, I see. You'll be dancing on Devil's Mountain next Halloween, no doubt. And fine you'll look with your missis here! Broomsticks all round and the moon shining.

GIDEON

M'am, this be my sister. If I've a mind to dance on Devil's Mountain along of witches, I will. And if I've a mind to dance at the Hunt Ball along of the gentry, I will. But I wanna ask for you for a partner. And I wanna vote for Squire, neither. Can a man govern the land if he canna govern his women? (*Dorabella, shocked at the insult, is ready to slap Gideon*)

YOUNG SQUIRE CAMPERDINE (*stopping her hand*)

Dorabella, come! A lady does not brangle in a tavern.

(*DORABELLA and YOUNG SQUIRE exit.*)

GIDEON (*throws some coins on the table.*)

Come, Prue. It's getting dark and there's a house I want you to see.

Scenic Segue to outside the House On the Hill

Outside the Lullingford House -- early evening

PRUE

It's a despart big house. I'd as lief there was a light.

GIDEON

There'll be light enough when I am master there. Now listen to what I have to say, Prue. You know as me and Jancis have taken up together in good sadness? (*PRUE nods*) I want the wench so bad that I'm near set to give up all and bring her home to Sarn. Order one of them rush cradles of Missis Beguildy! So, to conquer the weakness of longing, I come here.

PRUE

You mean, to harden your heart.

GIDEON

I planned to get some education out of you to help me at election times: to be so well thought of that I could even put my heart on a Squire's girl.

PRUE

Miss Dorabella?

GIDEON

No less. Ever since she give me that first saucy look I've had it in mind. If I could bring myself to give up Jancis –

PRUE

Give up your sweetheart? Jancis has been-

GIDEON

Well, I had it in mind. But now I've changed. I wanna give up Jancis. Or this house. I'll have both. I'll lead Jancis out like a lady, at the Hunt Ball. And when Dorabella Camperdine comes across my path, let her look to herself! I'll take her. Out of wedlock, I will! For what she said to you and me today, I'll make the Squire's girl my whore!

PRUE

Then you dunna love Jancis in good sadness. You do but lust.

GIDEON

Are you the Preacher? That's what book-learning does! I be as I was made. I'll have what I want, or die in 'tempting it.

PRUE

Then I fear me we are all set out on a dark road. *(PRUE notices a light in the house)*

Wait! I see a light – in the lower window on the garden side. *(it goes out.)*

Oh, it's gone out. *(PRUE begins to weep)*

GIDEON

It was just old Camperdine seeking his snuff-box. He's found it and douted the light.

PRUE *(weeping)*

No. It was love, lad, wanting to steady and shine. But the house was too much for it.

GIDEON

You mun be sickening for summat, Prue. You be no cry baby. Best be on our way.

PRUE

Mother is waiting for us.

(They load up their gear and set out for home in the dark. The melancholy music underscores "Lullingford".)

GIDEON

Well, it's bin a very costly day, and I'm in behopes you'll agree to all my plans.

PRUE *(depressed)*

It'd be all one if I didna.

GIDEON

Not if you wouldna work.

PRUE

Oh, I'll work. I was never afeard of work. *(a burst of eerie birdsong from the trees)*

GIDEON

Hark! The Seven Whistlers!

PRUE

Tis only some magpies.

GIDEON

No. Those be the Ghostly ones. They bode no good.

PRUE

Sure, Gideon, you laugh at signs and bodings. Ye canna—

(GIDEON and PRUE arrive at the edge of Sarn House. MOTHER runs out to them, weeping)

MOTHER

My dears, O my dears? Be you not drownd-ed in Sarn Mere? I saw you so in the tea leaves!

GIDEON

We're well enough, Ma. Never fret.

MOTHER *(touching them to be sure they are alive)*

I can scarce believe--

PRUE *(embraces her)*

Never fret, dear heart. I willna leave you.

MOTHER

Gideon, there's someone here wants to see you.

(JANCIS comes out from the house where she's been waiting for GIDEON's return. MOTHER and PRUE go into the house.)

GIDEON

You got away.

JANCIS

Out the window-- and I must be back straight away, lest Father come home. Quick—

GIDEON *(embrace & kiss.)*

You smell like roses and milk, and fit in my arms as if you were made for me.

JANCIS

I am made for you, Gideon!

GIDEON

They say your father is bragging he'll get Young Squire Camperdine fer you.

JANCIS

Pay no mind to what Father says.

GIDEON

Jancis, let us be handfasted.

JANCIS

Oh, Gideon! It's what I've wanted! Meet me in the meadow this Sunday.
Father will be away.

GIDEON

Aye, I'll be there.

ON SUNDAY I'LL MEET YOU WHERE THE WILD FLOWERS GROW.
WE SHALL KISS IN THE MEADOW - TO THE CHURCH WE WILL NA' GO.

JANCIS

BUT ON ONE SHINING MORNING I'LL GO TO CHURCH-- I PRAY -
THAT MY SWEETHEART WILL BE WITH ME, FOR OUR OWN WEDDING DAY!

GIDEON

WILL YOU DANCE WITH ME LASSIE, WHERE THE WILD FLOWERS GROW?

JANCIS

WE SHALL BOW AND TURN TOGETHER, FOR THE STEPS I'M SURE YOU KNOW.

GIDEON and JANCIS

AS WE GO, SMILING, TURNING, IN THE MERRY MONTH OF MAY.
WE'LL BE SWEETHEARTS FOREVER, NEVER PART, NEVER STRAY!

But we mun be careful, Jancis. No babe must come afore we have the house. A man with a family never gets on. He must make his money first.

Beguildy's Stone House -- The Love-Spinning Party

The WOMEN attending the "Do" have been spinning since early morning, making thread to be woven into cloth for Jancis' wedding trousseau.)

WOMEN SPINNERS

THE THREAD WE SPIN WE'LL LAY ON THE LOOM
A GIFT FOR THE BRIDE AND MANLY GROOM.
A SPINNING DO WITH CAKES AND CIDER,
OUR HANDS AND HEARTS AT WORK BESIDE HER
AS WE GO ALONG. SINGING OUR SONG.
SINGING THE SONG OF THE WHEEL
WE SPIN – WE SPIN TO PROVIDE -FOR JANCIS THE BRIDE
AND GIDEON SOON AT HER SIDE. LA DE DA DA DE DA (ETC.)

UNMARRIED WOMEN (except prue)

AND MAYBE ONE DAY WE'LL BE SPINNING AND SINGING
AND BELLS WILL BE RINGING, FOR MY LAD AND ME.

TIVVY

MY LAD AND ME!

FELENA

BEFORE YOU START YOUR COOING
BETTER BE SURE THAT THE MAN WHO IS WOOING
IS HONEST AND FREE!

TIVVY & UNMARRIED WOMEN

LET HIM BE FREE!

JANCIS (*to PRUE*)

Prue, don't I look fine in ringlets?

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Was it you done your mother's hair like that, too?

MOTHER

She did so. I binna tending swine today. Today I be a lady.

PRUE

Indeed you be, my dear. When we play at cards, you'll win cakes enough to keep us a week.

JANCIS

You're the one with the headpiece for cards, Prue.

FELENA

If the stakes be summat they've set their hearts on, t'would take a power of luck to better one of the Sarns. (*goes back to singing with SPINNERS*)

SPINNERS

LA DE DA DA DE DA (ETC)
WE'VE SPUN THE FLAX. IT'S NEARLY MID-DAY.
WE'LL FINISH THE HEMP, AND THEN WE SHALL PLAY
A GAME OF CARDS FOR THOSE WHO RISK IT
WILL WIN A CAKE OR A LEMON BISCUIT

AS WE GO ALONG. SINGING A SONG.
SINGING THE SONG OF THE WHEEL---,
WE SPIN. WE SPIN TO PROVIDE--- FOR JANCIS THE BRIDE
AND GIDEON SOON AT HER SIDE. LA DE DA DA DE DA (ETC)

MOTHER (to Jancis)

Will your Father be away all the day long?

JANCIS

Mother got her cousin to call him to Lullingford for a tooth-drawing. Past nightfall, sure.

MOTHER

But what about the Weaver? When the Wizard sees him--?

JANCIS

Weaving cloth from thread that was spun for us? Without pay? Father'll think 'twas his idea!

MISSIS B

O, all the girls are in a tizzy here for that the Weaver's not come yet! Tivvy says he's wonderful handsome, and every unmarried girl for miles around is spinning for Jancis to get a look at him!
(The WOMEN laugh; JANCIS & MISSIS B rejoin the others.)

MOTHER (to Prue)

Will Jancis be a good daughter to me, Prue?

PRUE

She will, Mother. But until Wizard can be brought round to consent –

MOTHER

Oh, Prue! What if the babes be spit an' image of Old Beguildy?

PRUE

Never you fret. Beguildy be mostly a painted show.

SPINNERS

WE'VE SPUN THE HEMP, LET'S CALL IT A DAY
WE'LL BUNDLE IT UP AND PUT IT AWAY
FOR NOW OUR BACKS ARE GETTING WEARY
OUR EYES ARE GROWING DIM AND BLEARY
AS WE GO ALONG
SINGING OUR SONG. SINGING OUR SONG. LA DI DA ETC.

MOTHER (*looking at FELENA'S work*)

You spin like a fairy, Missis Felena.

FELENA

There's nought else to do on the mountain but spin.

MISSIS PREACHER

Save on midsummer night, my girl. Then, I've heard, you've enough to do and plenty!
(*disapproving reaction from the women, interest from girls*)

TIVVY

Oh, look! I see Weaver coming! (*one or two go to look out for the Weaver*)

MISSIS PREACHER

Before we start the play-partying, best bless it with a hymn

HE BROUGHT ME TO HIS LORDLY HOUSE (*ALL JOIN*)

HIS BANNER IT WAS LOVE.

HE SPREAD A FEAST BEFORE MY SIGHT, OF MANNA— ("FROM ABOVE")

SUKEY & MOLL (*Enter with the WEAVER*)

Here be the Weaver! (*giggle. PRUE hides herself where she cannot be seen.*)

PRUE (*to audience*)

Oh! What man is this? I scarce can breathe and my heart is like to burst! As Magdalene felt for the Master, I am a moth to his flame... He mustna see my face.

KESTER (*laughing*)

Servant, Ladies! Kester Woodseaves, if you please, Missis.

SUKEY

THE WEAVER!

MOLL

SO WE THOUGHT HIM.

SUKEY

WHEN WE CAUGHT HIM

MOLL

BY THE THISTLE.

SUKEY & MOLL

WHEN WE HEARD HIM WHISTLE

HE WAS WHISTLING LIKE A THROSTLE

SO WE PEPPERED HIM WITH QUESTIONS

AND WE BROUGHT HIM TO THE DO.

ALL

THEY PEPPERED HIM WITH QUESTIONS
AND THEY BROUGHT HIM TO THE DO.

SUKEY

HE HAS A SILVER PIPE.

MOLL

A SUNDAY COAT OF GREEN.

SUKEY

A BEAUTIFUL BIBLE WITH A BROWN LEATHER JACKET

SUKEY & MOLL

WITH PICTURES IN BETWEEN!

ALL

AND WE SEE'D IT!

AND THEY SEE'D IT!

SUKEY

HE CAN READ IT!

ALL

HE CAN READ IT.

SUKEY

HE LIKES A MERRY SONG.

MOLL

WILL SING IT IN A ROUND.

(WOMEN SING: TRA LA LA LA LA).

SUKEY (*draws Kester into dance*)

IN SPRING HE LIKES A DANCE IN THE MEADOW.

MOLL

AND THE BELLS' DEEP DING-DONG SOUND.

KESTER

ALL IN REASON.

AND IN SEASON.

ALL

ALL IN REASON.

AND IN SEASON.

SUKEY & MOLL

HE PREFERS A QUIET LIFE.

MOLL

BUT HE WOULDNA MIND HAVING A WIFE.

KESTER

I WOULDNA MIND A WOMAN, BUT I'VE NO ONE YET.

CAUSE THE WOMAN I'D LEIF, I'VE NEVER MET!

SUKEY & MOLL
HE'S NEVER MET ONE.

ALL
PERHAPS HE'LL GET ONE.

SUKEY & MOLL
NOW HE'S HERE –

ALL
SHE MAY BE NEAR.

FELENA (*spoken*)

What doesn't he like?

SUKEY
HE HATES COCK FIGHTING.

MOLL
AND BULL BAITING.

SUKEY & MOLL

AND HE DOESN'T LIKE BULLYING MEN.
(*spoken*) And – and – (*flustered*)

KESTER

AND I CANNA ABIDE
GIRLS WHO QUESTION ME AND TEASE ME!
SO IF YOU PLEASE TO PLEASE ME,
I WOULD LIKE A CUP OF TEA.

SUKEY & MOLL

WE SURELY WANT TO PLEASE YOU WITH A LOVELY CUP OF TEA!

FELENA

Be you from far, sir?

KESTER

Lullingford, missis. Not very far.

FELENA

I live on the mountain over yonder. Nigher to Lullingford than this is. It'd be on your road to – almost everywhere.

PRUE (*from her hiding place*)

Felena says all that I'd like to say! "Weaver" is what he says he is. If he said he was a robber or the king of fairyland, it's all one to me. I'll ne'er be heart-whole again.

FELENA

And you live alone, you say? No woman?

KESTER

Missis, your thoughts go all one way. I'm thinking you were an attorney once, and stuck questions into poor men like skewers before you put 'em out of their misery.

(to Jancis) You're the one is to be wed, child?

JANCIS

To Gideon Sarn, sir. Dun you know Gideon?

KESTER

I've heard tell of him.

JANCIS

Come to my wedding! Prue'll write you a bidding.

KESTER

Happen I will. But tell me: Who's Prue?

JANCIS

Prue Sarn. She's shy with strangers. Perhaps she's gone to hide.

KESTER

That's a pity. I admire a girl who can write, be it biddings or letters or poems. Well, I thank you, Missis, for the tea and cake. And now for work. I'm to weave in the attic, I suppose?

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Ah, I'll show you. There's a bed there, too. You wanna finish for two days or three.

(MISSIS BEGUILDY and KESTER exit. PRUE comes out of hiding.)

SUKEY

I like Weaver better even than Gideon, Prue. Though Gideon be your brother.

FELENA

He's a man to gamble for!

MISSIS PREACHER

Take your places now! Cut for first deal in the game of Costly Colours.

(The WOMEN start setting up the cards, all except PRUE, who walks out of the Stone House scene as it fades. As she goes, PRUE confides in the audience:)

PRUE

A man to gamble for? A man to die for! Kester Woodseaves. Kester Woodseaves.

SEGUE TO Sarn House, same evening.

(PRUE takes out her Bible, hunts for a certain page and finds it.)

PRUE

Here are the words that describe how I feel!

"The master is come and calleth for thee." Yes, that's it! The master is come. *(SINGS)*

WHEN THE MASTER COMES
YOU CANNA GIVE HIM CRUMBS,
YOU MUST GIVE ALL.
BRING OUT ALL YOUR BEST
FOR THAT BIDDEN GUEST
STANDING SO TALL
WEAR YOUR SUNDAY GOWN
AND TIE A DAISY CROWN INTO YOUR HAIR.
NOD YOUR HEAD AND SAY
WOULD YOU CARE TO STAY?
PLEASE TAKE A CHAIR.....

(She is in a domestic daydream – taking off her apron, etc-- comes back to reality as GIDEON enters on his way to bed.)

GIDEON

Prue, you be asleep on your feet. Off to bed now, or you'll do no work tomorrow.

PRUE

He's right. I mun be asleep on my feet, and dreaming.

WHAT MAN COULD EVER LOVE
A GIRL LIKE ME?
BORN WITH A DEVIL'S MARK
FOR ALL TO SEE.
HERE I STAND APART,
TOO SHAMED TO SPEAK.
HIDING AN ACHING HEART
FROM HIM I SEEK.

PRUE

A perfect man should marry a beautiful woman – one like Jancis, or Dorabella. Not a hare-shot-ten girl like me. Gideon says no man would want me: how much less this, the best of men?

HE MUN NEVER KNOW
THAT I LOVE HIM SO:
I'LL NEVER SAY.
WHEN THE MASTER COMES--
IF THE MASTER COMES,
I'LL GO MY WAY.

FROM A DISTANCE, I'LL SEE HIM SMILING;
HEAR HIS VOICE-- WARM AND BEGUILING,
LIKE A SONG I'VE HEARD IN A DREAM BEFORE.

SPIRITS HAUNT THE FLESH, SOULS AND BODIES MESH.
SILENT WORDS ARE FLOWN, MAKING SECRETS KNOWN -
BUT MY WORDS WILL STAY -
AND I'LL NEVER SAY:
MASTER BE COME!
MASTER BE COME!

Beguildy's Stone House. Afternoon.

JANCIS and MISSIS B have been happily planning Jancis' wedding when WIZARD BEGUILDY comes bustling in, puffed up with pride and wizardly satisfaction.

BEGUILDY

Young Camperdine is coming here tomorrow night, and I'm to raise Missis Venus from the Underworld. He'll pay me five pounds just to see her! The Goddess of Love!

MISSIS BEGUILDY

And if pigs could fly--!

BEGUILDY

I can do it! Same as I raised you as an angel once, at Severn Fair, and the demon Beelzebub for Old Hoople! You and I, Missis, hoisting on the harness rope, with music and smoke and --

MISSIS BEGUILDY

A dog with horns in a fiery red light? He'll never take that for Venus!

BEGUILDY

A beautiful naked girl, that long golden wig you wore, and a rosy pink light a-shining on her!

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Girl? What girl?

BEGUILDY

Who but Jancis?

JANCIS

Me? O, no no no! He'll ruin me, Mother!

MISSIS BEGUILDY

How can you think of it? Our own daughter!

BEGUILDY

Why else was she sent to us? A beauty like her? It'd be a crime not to profit from it! If Camperdine will pay five pound just to see her, think what he'll offer to take her to bed!

JANCIS

No, no, no. I'm promised to Gideon! Gideon'll kill me!

BEGUILDY

That ill-omened Sarn is a man of wrath and covetousness! I foretell he'll be the death of us all, if you marry him! He dunna love Jancis: he wants her same as Camperdine, but he'll be one as takes and will not pay! Just like his father--

MISSIS BEGUILDY

But Jancis and Gideon are handfasted--

BEGUILDY (*pummels JANCIS*)

I never consented to Sarn! I'm your father, and I say you'll be Venus! Or I'll put you out to field work, and beat you every day for a year!

(He exits. Missis B gets out the long golden wig, comforts Jancis)

MISSIS BEGUILDY

There there, m'dear. Gideon needna know. You'll wear this long golden wig, and it'll be too smokey-dimmery for the man to see your face.....

JANCIS (*grabbing the wig and starting up..*)

Prue. Prue mun help me or I'm like to die.

(Jancis exits the house as the lights cross fade sunset to evening. PRUE meets her, cloaked, and Jancis ties Prue's dark hair up under Venus's wig.)

PRUE (*bitterly*)

A funny thing, for me to be Venus.

JANCIS

He inna to see your face. If it were me, Gideon'd be bound to find out.

PRUE

Aye. Under this wig, the young man will see what he's come to see: a naked woman. He'll pay the money, and you'll go free.

JANCIS

O, Prue, you are so good! I love you, Prue. (*embraces PRUE*) I'll make it up to you some way – but the best of it is that it wanna matter to you, seeing as you'll never have a lover.

PRUE (*angry and bitter. Music starts*)

No more talk, or I'll lose courage. They say those who do good things will be rewarded – but we see everywhere that that's not true. (*JANCIS leads PRUE off.*)

Beguilty's STONE HOUSE. Night.

YOUNG SQUIRE CAMPERDINE & KESTER seated on bench, BEGUILDY instructing.

BEGUILDY

Remember, Young Squire-- and you too, man-- that you have sworn not to speak or to move when the Goddess of Love comes to you. She is a spirit only, but an insult or a threat to her will put you in mortal danger. (*exiting*) Remember your oath!

CAMPERDINE (*calls after Wizard, laughing*)

Don't worry, Wizard. I'll remember to pay you, too, if she comes. Spirit or whatever she is.

BEGUILDY (*from offstage, with music*)

Come music, come magic, come Venus-- from beyond this mortal coil! I summon thee, spiritus extramunditus, e nomine sanctifacissimus jubilissimus (*etc. Ad lib*)

CAMPERDINE

What the --! (*KESTER hushes him. PRUE rises haloed in smoky rose light, in whose reflection we see KESTER'S face: struck with love as CAMPERDINE is struck with lust.*)

CAMPERDINE (*whispering*)

The Queen of Beauty.

KESTER (*whispering*)

Ah. So she be. (*awestruck, music fading as PRUE begins to sink out of sight.*)

BEGUILDY (*calling*)

Well, well, young gentlemen, have I earned my five pound?

CAMPERDINE

Aye, aye! And more! (*PRUE vanishes, BEGUILDY is on his way back into the room*)
Much more, if I could speak to her!

BEGUILDY

What now? How can you speak with Missis Venus? Hanna she been dead and gone this thousand year? I fetched her for you, through the grave and gate of death –

CAMPERDINE

For five pound. (*holds out the pay*)

BEGUILDY

For five pound – but I canna keep her. She comes on a cloud, and then she's gone – a beautiful Bogy, she is. (*CAMPERDINE and KESTER stifle laughter as BEGUILDY hustles them out*)

CAMPERDINE

I'll have another look at Venus one day, Beguildy. She's got a very tidy figure, by gad, wherever she's from! (*the two MEN exit the house*)

KESTER (*when outside*)

Camperdine, best we say nought about this. Country folk are all too apt to see the Devil's hand in what you and I know is a puppet show.

CAMPERDINE

Mum's the word. We'll keep this between me and thee- and a certain Wizard's daughter?

KESTER

His daughter's a little white thing, more like a fairy than a Goddess.

CAMPERDINE

Ah, I'd see more of her to be certain.

KESTER

More than all?

CAMPERDINE (*They go off.*)

Closer, Woodseaves. Closer.

PRUE (*her face in light now, body cloaked*)

He couldna see my curse! He could only see my skin gleaming pale, and my shape as fine as any other woman's shape. I was ashamed, but when I looked into his eyes, I saw a longing that went straight to my heart.

SURE, HE THOUGHT ME FAIR, WHEN HE SAW ME THERE, STRUNG FROM ABOVE
I COULD FEEL HIS EYES, MUCH TO MY SURPRISE, BUT WAS IT LOVE?
YES, HE WANTED ME, I FELT HIS YEARNING.
YES, HE LONGED FOR ME, HOW I WAS BURNING -
LIKE A RESTLESS BRIDE, AFLAME WITH LOVE INSIDE!
SPIRITS HAUNT THE FLESH, SOULS AND BODIES MESH.
SILENT WORDS ARE FLOWN, MAKING SECRETS KNOWN.
MIGHT THERE BE A DAY, WHEN MY LIPS CAN SAY –
MASTER BE COME? MASTER BE COME!

In the Fields. Spring. Day

(*GIDEON is working. The ENSEMBLE sings and mimes or dances time passing*)

ENSEMBLE

TURN, TURN, THE SEASONS TURN.
THE CHILDREN SPORT AND PLAY
BUT GIDEON PLOUGHS: ON OUR DAY OF REST
HE'S UP AT THE BREAK OF DAY.
BEFORE WE TAKE SOME TIME FOR FUN
WE SCATTER AND WE SOW.
WITH GOD'S GOOD HELP, AND PLENTY OF SUN
THE SEEDS SHALL SURELY GROW.

(*JANCIS & PRUE enter. JANCIS goes to Gideon.*)

JANCIS

I've got news. Good or bad, as you make it. It's this-a-way, Sarn. Father says I mun - (*stops, embarrassed – looks to PRUE for support.*)

PRUE

Beguildy means to sell the child, Gideon. To Camperdine, for his pleasure.

(*JANCIS hides her face in her hands.*)

And if she says no, she's to go as a kitchen wench or dairy maid to the May Fair, and be 'prenticed beyond Lullingford for three years.

GIDEON

What? Sell my girl? I'll drown the Wizard dead for that!

PRUE

He's not sold her yet.

GIDEON (*pulls JANCIS' hands away from her face.*)

The better for 'un. Be you a true wench to me? Damn me, if you've lost your maidenhead to Camperdine, I'll lay him out with a pole-axe. And you I'll strangle!

JANCIS

No, no, Sarn! I hanna. I be a good maid to you. But I canna bear to go away.

PRUE

It'll only put the riches off for a bit, Gideon.

GIDEON (*to Prue*)

If I take Jancis now, in the teeth of Camperdine's longing for her, he'll set all the gentry against me. Whatever's made the man so mad in love, we mun take care.

(JANCIS silently pleads with PRUE to tell GIDEON about Venus, but PRUE gestures her to keep the secret, her finger to her lips.)

We'll wait three year. That'll give us time to reap what we sow.

PRUE

But not if it's the bane, Gideon! Not if it's the precious bane, as I read about in the Good Book! You dunna want that amid the corn, lad!

GIDEON

Whatever it is, if I sow it and it brings me the thing I'd lief have, I'll welcome it! I'll come on Sunday and tell your Father what I think on him.

JANCIS (*sings*)

NO, GIDEON! DUNNA ANGER HIM!
IT WILL ONLY MAKE MATTERS WORSE.
OH, WHY CANNA' FOLKS LIVE QUIET AND PEACEFUL?
WHT MUST THEY FIGHT AND HARM ONE ANOTHER?
I WANT TO SHOUT OUT THE BIDDINGS IN CHURCH!
OH, BE MY SWEETHEART, SARN!

LOVING WORDS WE HAVE SPOKEN.
PROMISES SHOULD NE'ER BE BROKEN.
TOGETHER WE MUN GO.
WALKING IN THE SUNLIGHT WHERE THE FLOWERS BLOOM AND GROW.

I AM YOURS, SAY YOU LOVE ME.
AND I SWEAR, IF YOU LOVE ME,
PROMISE WE'LL BE WED,
AND I'LL SHARE YOUR BED AND GIVE YOU ALL MY LOVE TONIGHT.
THE TIME IS RIGHT. DON'T LET OUR LOVE GROW COLD.
IF YOU LET GO, YOUR LOVER WILL BE SOLD!
DON'T MAKE ME WALK THAT ROAD! (3 X)

GIDEON

You be pulling me down to poverty and the loss of all I've dreamt of.

PRUE

If you marry her, I'll work double, lad.

GIDEON

What use? You know right well what will happen. A man with a family never gets on. The best thing is to put off the wedding. That'll give us time to turn round. Not as I want to put it off.

(weakening as JANCIS crumbles, GIDEON takes JANCIS in his arms and kisses her, then breaks away from her.)

JANCIS *(pleading)*

THE TIME IS NOW. DON'T PUSH OUR LOVE ASIDE.

GIDEON

IT WON'T BE LONG.

PRUE

CHOOSE YOUR BLESSINGS, LAD!

JANCIS

DON'T WAIT THREE YEAR —

GIDEON

WE'LL WAIT.

PRUE

CHOOSE THE GOOD ROAD - THE PATH OF LOVE!

JANCIS

TO TAKE ME FOR YOUR BRIDE.
DON'T MAKE ME SAY GOODBYE.

PRUE

DEAR LORD, FORBID IT!

JANCIS

DON'T TELL ME TIME WILL FLY.

GIDEON

MY MIND IS SET!

JANCIS, PRUE & GIDEON

YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT LIFE WILL BRING, BY AND BY!

JANCIS

DON'T MAKE ME WAIT FOR YOU.

PRUE & GIDEON

WHEN LOVE IS STRONG --

JANCIS

DON'T MAKE ME ACHE FOR YOU.

DON'T MAKE ME WALK --

PRUE

THREE YEARS IS MUCH TOO LONG!

DON'T MAKE HER WALK --

GIDEON

THREE YEARS IS NOT TOO LONG.

JANCIS

THAT ROAD.

ENSEMBLE

(offstage, or entering like ghosts from the back)

AH AH AH AH--

JANCIS

I mun go. Come now, or send for me, Sarn!

(JANCIS runs off, GIDEON begins to follow then turns in the other direction.)

-Lullingford Hiring Fair, and Bull-Baiting: mid-morning

People gathering, crossing, greeting one another. PRUE and GIDEON have set up their stand near where JANCIS and CHORUS are standing with symbols of their trades. They call to passers-by.

CHORUS

LULLINGFORD,
NOW THE CROWDS ARE A-BUSTLING.
EXCITEMENT AND NOISE EVERYWHERE.

CHORUS

A COOK! A VERY THRIFTY COOK!

CHORUS

MEN AND MAIDS COME A-HUSTLING –

MAID 1

A DAIRY MAID!

MAID 2

A SCULLERY MAID!

MAID 1 & MAID 2

WE'RE WILLING TO WORK AS LONG AS WE'RE PAID!

CHORUS

THEIR APRONS A-RUSTLING -

LAUNDRESS

A LAUNDRESS!

FRIEND

THE VERY BEST!

FARMHAND

A MAN WITH A HOE WHO'LL MAKE YOUR SEEDS GROW!

A FEW WORKERS

A-SEEKING EMPLOYMENT –

WORKERS

WE'RE SEEKING EMPLOYMENT –

FARMHAND

A SKILLFUL WILLING WORKER FOR YOUR FARM!

CHORUS

AT THE HIRING FAIRE.

WORKER

A STRONG RIGHT ARM! (*CHIMES/MUSIC VAMPS*)

PRUE

There's Jancis. I hope she goes to a master who is patient.

GIDEON

Jancis is going to Grimble's!

PRUE

How can you tell?

GIDEON

Because I told her so. Grimble's will pay the most.

WORKERS, EMPLOYERS

LULLINGFORD! LULLINGFORD!

WORKERS

LULLINGFORD!

EMPLOYERS

MAY THIS DAY PROVE PROSPEROUS

WORKER & EMPLOYER (*matching up*)

VERY PROSPEROUS!

WORKERS

MAY I GET A GOOD JOB AT THE FAIRE.

COOK

A COOK! A COOK! A VERY THRIFTY COOK.

JANCIS

A MASTER WHO'LL BE KIND TO ME.

A WARM AND EASY PLACE TO BE.

PRUE (*calling to Jancis*)

Jancis!

ALL WORKERS

MAY BE THAT BIG HOUSE THAT OVERLOOKS THE SQUARE!

JANCIS (*calling to Gideon*)

Gideon, Missis Grimble says they will hire me-- if Father agrees!

BEGUILDY

Twenty pounds for the three years.

MISSIS GRIMBLE

Nay. That's too much. Eighteen.

BEGUILDY

She's strong. Make it twenty and I give you leave to drive her.

GIDEON

Anyone lays a finger on my girl and it'll be the worse for 'em. And Jancis is to have the money: not you, Beguildy.

BEGUILDY

Did you ever hear the like? 'Tis the Father hires out his child, not some swaggering fellow born under the thr'penny planet! Mark me, this'n will come to be drowned!

(GIDEON gives BEGUILDY a slap with the flat of his hand that knocks him off balance. JANCIS and MISSIS GRIMBLE help BEGUILDY up but hold him back, as PRUE maneuvers GIDEON away from the Wizard)

I'll pay you for this! The very spit of your dad, you be. You owe me the crown your Father died in debt to me, curse you! Curse you in beasts and in housen--!

JANCIS

Will you sign the contract, Father?

MISSIS GRIMBLE

I want no trouble.

BEGUILDY

There'll be none. So long as my girl is miles away from Gideon Sarn.

(BEGUILDY glares at the retreating GIDEON, then turns to sign the contract after MISSIS GRIMBLE makes her mark. They discuss arrangements. YOUNG CAMPERDINE enters to look over the maids)

PRUE *(pulling Gideon downstage to talk)*
Jancis'll be terrible lonesome.

GIDEON
I thought of that. Jancis'll get letters from me. You can write them.

PRUE
But how will she answer? None of the Grimble's can write.

GIDEON
I thought of that. Grimble's have Weaver every month or two. Weaver can write for Jancis.

YOUNG CAMPERDINE *(calls)*
Sarn?

PRUE
You mean Mr. Woodseaves?
(GIDEON ignores Prue's question, crosses to join Young Squire)

GIDEON
Camperdine?

PRUE *(imagining it)*
Weaver 'll write for Jancis, and I'll write for Gideon. Love letters... *(sings)*

AND IN WHAT THE LETTER SAYS THAT JANCIS WOULD NEVER SAY—

YOUNG CAMPERDINE
I heard that a real beauty is come to the faire. My lady Aunt wants a maid, and--

PRUE
AND IN ALL THAT WEAVER WRITES, I'LL FIND HIM.

GIDEON
Jancis Beguildy's prenticed already. To a farmer a great way off.

PRUE *(still off in her own space)*
EVERY FEELING, EVERY PLAN, WILL SHOW THE INNER MAN -

YOUNG CAMPERDINE (*thinking of Prue as Venus*)
Was there a very tall maid here? Tall and beautiful as a Goddess?

GIDEON
No Goddesses.

PRUE
AS THE LORD DESIGNED HIM, BEFORE THE WORLD BEGAN!

YOUNG CAMPERDINE
Alas! A great disappointment to my good lady Aunt.

GIDEON
Your lady Aunt, Sir, will soon find another. Never faithful to one long, innit?

YOUNG CAMPERDINE (*friendly*)
Come along to the Tavern, Sarn. I'll buy you a drink.

GIDEON (*looking for PRUE*)
Prue! Where has she gone to?

PRUE
AND IN ALL THAT I WRITE, HE'LL FIND ME.
EVERY SINGLE WORD I SAY
WILL TURN HIS MIND MY WAY--
HE'LL KNOW WHAT'S INSIDE ME
CONCEAL IT THOUGH I MAY -
THIS PASSING OF WORDS IS A PRECIOUS GIFT TO ME -
A KIND OF PRETENCE THAT WILL SET ME FREE....

GIDEON (*finding Prue*)
There you are. What ails you? Anybody'd think you were in love! Clear up the stand, Prue. Camperdine and me are going for a drink before the bull-baiting.

PRUE (*hiding her face from Camperdine*)
Aye.

GIDEON
Have you heard who's got the best dog? Come, we'll find Grimble. I hear tell he's got a new mastiff, fierce as fire.

GIDEON & CAMPERDINE

LULLINGFORD! EXCITEMENT AT LULLINGFORD

WE'RE OFF TO SEE THE DOGS AT THE FAIRE.

(flirting with 2 pretty girls)

COME AND SEE THE DOGS AT THE FAIRE.

TWO FEMALE WORKERS

WE WISH WE COULD: BUT CANNA STAY

WE'RE STARTING WORK THIS VERY DAY.

TWO MEN

WE'RE ON THE JOB TOMORROW NIGHT.

WHICH MEANS WE'VE TIME TO SEE THE FIGHT!

CHORUS

WE'VE FOUND OUR EMPLOYMENT!

THIS MAY BE OUR LAST ENJOYMENT.

COOK AND MAID

AND THOUGH FOR THE COOK AND SCULLERY MAID

'T WILL BE THREE YEARS BEFORE WE'RE PAID-

WE'LL CELEBRATE TONIGHT WITHOUT A CARE!

CHORUS

THANKS TO LULLINGFORD- LULLINGFORD! LULLINGFORD!

AT THE FAIRE!

Lullingford Dogfight, evening

(Excitement builds as the CROWD gathers for the fight.

MISSIS GRIMBLE approaches PRUE, who is clearing up the Sarn stand.)

MISSIS GRIMBLE

You be sister to my new dairymaid's young man, binna you? I'm in behopes-- they're serious?

PRUE

Handfasted, and had a Love Spinning, too.

MISSIS GRIMBLE

I like my wench'es handfasted. I've got sons, and it's a deal safer. And when the man's at a distance, it dunna hinder the work. *(Underscore "Hareshotten" music)*

Too bad your brother inna the one with the harelip. For him it wouldna' be so great an affliction. *(Sees KESTER in the distance, turns toward him and calls)*
Weaver! Weaver! *(PRUE, panicked, ducks out of sight-- under the stand)*
When will ye' work for me next, Weaver?

KESTER

(tips hat to MISSIS G, but is trying to see round her to locate PRUE)

Missis Grimble. And..?

MISSIS GRIMBLE

Why, lookee! Where'd the Sarn girl go? Fled away as if you were the plague!

KESTER

That was the Sarn girl? Gideon's sister?

MISSIS GRIMBLE *(nods)*

Prue, from yonder at Sarn Mere. Queer creature, with a hare-shotten lip. Some say she's a bit of a witch.

KESTER

A very tidy figure she's got.

MISSIS GRIMBLE

On your way to see the dogs fight the bull? I love a good fight. My Mister's got a champion.

KESTER

Why, yes and no to that. You'll see in good time, Missis Grimble. I have my own ideas about the fighting. *(They go off in the direction of the fight. PRUE looks at KESTER walking away, and responding to a premonition takes a knife from the stand and follows him.)*

CHORUS *(mostly male, women playing boys)*

LULLINGFORD! THERE'S A FIGHT ON AT LULLINGFORD
A FIGHT! A FIGHT!
WE'LL BAIT THE BULL TONIGHT!
PACKS OF SAVAGE DOGS AT THE FAIRE!
THERE'S BINGO! THERE'S TOBY! THERE'S BEAR!

DOG OWNER 1

THIS COIN SAYS MY DOG WILL WIN.

DOG OWNER 2

ARE YOU'RE FOOL ENOUGH TO BET ON HIM?

CHORUS

SEE THE BULL'S FLASHING HOOVES
AND DOGS WITH RAZOR TEETH THAT TEAR!

GRIMBLE

You've seen my new dog?

HUGELET (*standing with his dog, Bingo*)

Fiercest thing I've ever seen. But he's young and untried, so I'll stick with my Bingo: he's ripped more flesh from bone than any dog in Shropshire.

GRIMBLE

You'll back your old dog with cash money? (*KESTER comes up*)

HUGELET (*to Kester*)

Where's your dog?

GRIMBLE

Why, it's Weaver. Dunna you know Weaver, Hugelet?

HUGELET

We hanna crossed paths. Where's your dog, Weaver?

KESTER

I've got none.

Stand aside, then.

CHORUS

LULLINGFORD, THERE'S A FIGHT ON AT LULLINGFORD
SEE THE SAVAGE DOGS AT THE FAIRE!

KESTER (*addressing the crowd*)

Friends! I've come to ask you to stop this. (*shocked silence, then roars of laughter and heckling*)

HUGELET

That's a good 'un! Stop the dogs? Stop the bull baiting?

CHORUS

SEE THE BULL'S FLASHING HOOVES, DOGS WITH RAZOR TEETH THAT TEAR!

GRIMBLE

And what for would you stop it, dear heart?

HUGELET

He canna stop it!

KESTER

I'd as lief it was stopped all over England.

HUGELET

Why, I tell you there's been bull baiting and dog fighting in England ever since it was England!

KESTER

It's a cruel, miserable business.

GRIMBLE

It inna cruel. The dogs enjoy it.

HUGELET

What's it matter if the dogs enjoy it? I enjoy it! *(crowd roars approval)*

CALLARD

What be the trouble, Mister Grimble?

HUGELET

This here borsted fellow wants to stop the baiting.

GRIMBLE

The baiting we've all come many a weary mile to see! *(crowd roars)*

CALLARD

Deary me, the Missis and me bin at such trouble to bring the bull along.

KESTER

Sell your bull to me, Callard. I'll give you as much as you'd make if the bull won, and you can take him along home.

CALLARD

Twenty pound?

KESTER

Twenty pound.

CALLARD

God bless me!

MISSIS CALLARD

Take the gentleman's offer, my dear! Take the twenty pound, and us'll lead the darling home.

CALLARD

God bless me!

HUGELET

I'll give you "God bless me", an' you do any such thing!

CALLARD

The poor young man must be stark raving mad! Yet he was all right Sunday week, weaving for us as nice as nice-- Oh, I could cry-- (*KESTER offers money*)

MISSIS CALLARD & CHILD (*overlap Callard's line*)

Take the money, Father, take it!

HUGELET

Dunna you dare! We won't be robbed of our sport. (*CROWD agrees ad lib*)

KESTER

Sport? If it's fighting you want, why canna you wrestle? Or box man to man? Lookee! I'll take any six of you on, one after another! (*the crowd debates: Kester's weak: no, he's strong & fierce*)

GRIMBLE (*evil smile*)

The young man speaks well. I'll agree to the stopping -- on one condition.

KESTER

Out with it.

GRIMBLE

That you take on the dogs yourself. (*cruel laugh, others join*)

HUGELET

Got you there, me lad. On with the baiting!

CALLARD (*sadly, to Missis Callard*)

We mun bring up the bull, my dear.

GRIMBLE

Whose dog drew first?

HUGELET

My Bingo. He's ready.

KESTER

It'll be the best bit of sport you ever had, eh, Grimble? To see a man baited like a bull? Friends! I agree to Mister Grimble's plan, and will take on the dogs one by one-- not to kill them, but to put em on chain with naught but my bare hands. If I do this, will you put it in writing: no more baiting in Lullingford? (*great uproar, ad lib*)

HUGELET

Hands up for it. (*yes wins*) Done! Done FOR, my fine feller! At him, Bingo! Bite him!

(Music begins again. The CROWD is revved up, urging dog and man to battle. KESTER is calm, speaking softly and hypnotically until the dog, Bingo, comes lovingly to his hand.)

KESTER

Well, Bingo! Good dog. There, there, now. We be friends, binna we? You couldna know it, men, but there's naught but one dog in the village that isna my friend, and that's only cause he's new come and hasna met me. Bear! Good dog. Trey! Good dog, good boy. Beelzebub, you old mastiff, you! Are you a good dog for me? Good old dog. Y'see? They'd rather be friends.

GRIMBLE

My Toby's not your friend! Stand away all! For once I let loose my champion, here, he may attack more than the Weaver!

(Hidden by the crowd, Kester's faces Toby's vicious attack. There are growls and grunts and the sound of ripping clothes and gnashing teeth. The crowd is mad with excitement and cheering. The CHORUS ad libs during fight)

"Lookee that!" "Close one!" "He's thrown im off!" "Get im, get im!" "Grimble's dog is winning" "Strongest dog I ever see'd" "Toby's got him by the throat-- Weaver's done for!" (*etc.*)

PRUE (*rushing to pull at GRIMBLE'S shoulder, knife out*)

Take your dog off!

GRIMBLE (*shrugging PRUE off*)

Sic him, Toby! Tear him to pieces!

(PRUE lets loose a war cry and leaps past the crowd into the ring, knife raised high. We the dog's yelp of pain and the thud of bodies. When the crowd clears, we see the dead dog, and the unconscious KESTER covered in blood. PRUE rolls the dog's body off KESTER and cradles KESTER's limp form in her arms. PRUE snatches off her kerchief to staunch KESTER's blood.)

PRUE

Blacksmith, we mun burn the bite, run and get the hot poker. Best do it before he comes round. Hugelot, you murderer, fetch water! Who's got some brandy?

(Prue pours brandy on the wound, and into Kester's mouth.)

There, there, my dear. None shall harm you now.

END OF ACT ONE

**PRECIOUS BANE, ACT TWO,
a month or more has passed. Dusk. Bleak fields, workers toiling indoors and out.**

CHORUS (*offstage*)

BLEAK IS THE MERE IN NOVEMBER.
IN HUSHED WINDS THE AMBER LEAVES FLY.
WHEN WINTER IS HERE, THE ICE CRACKS ON THE MERE
WAKING GHOSTS ANSWER WITH A CRY?
DO YOU HEAR? CAN YOU HEAR?
LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS OF SARN MERE.

SONGS FILL THE SEASON OF PLENTY
IN WINTER THEY'RE MUFFLED AND THIN.
WE WORK TWICE AS HARD WHEN IT'S DARKSOME IN THE YARD
OUR BITTER SIGHS FROZEN FROM WITHIN.
DO YOU HEAR? CAN YOU HEAR?
LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS —OF SARN MERE--

(GIDEON enters Sarn House where Prue is putting out food)

MOTHER (*frightened to be caught resting*)

Sarn? I slipped in the mire and come in to dry and wrap m'self, but I'll go--

GIDEON

Never Mind. I brung in the pigs m'self.

MOTHER

Thankee, son. It's nigh dark, and I--

GIDEON

Prue! D' you mind the letter from Jancis? What'd she say about Grimble bringing lambs to Lullingford?

MOTHER (*gets letter, examines it*)

Letter's here in your book, Prue.

PRUE

No need: I remember it. Near Christmas Grimble will come to market,

GIDEON

Write to Jancis tonight, for me to take in to Lullingford for the post tomorrow. Tell her I'm well and I expect her to be working hard! Tell Grimble I could do with some lambs-- but no foot-rot! I'll see Jancis when Grimble brings the lambs to market, if he'll bring her. (*Prue begins letter*)

PRUE

Can I put in more? Sometimes the pen runs away with me.

GIDEON *(laughs)*

So you set down all I told you, put in whatever else you've a mind to. I must be up afore dawn, so I can't spend time on pretty words. Put in what a sweetheart wants to hear. *(exits for work)*

MOTHER *(examining Kester's letter written for Jancis)*

Here I see a tall "P" and a little "r". Be this your name? What does it say?

PRUE

Weaver's nearly healed of his wounds, and wants to come to Sarn to say his thanks.

MOTHER

Oh, Prue! Write in Gideon's letter Weaver mun come! I have thread spun he can make up, and --

PRUE

No, Mother! Go to bed, and dunna chide me. I have the letter-writing; which is more than I ever hoped for. *(prepares to write)* Dear Gideon... No.

PRUE *(writing letter; between speech and song)*

MY DEAREST DARLING SWEETHEART,
SEEMS A LONG TIME SINCE YOUR LETTER
WHICH I KISSED A GOOD FEW TIMES.
THERE'S LOVE BETWEEN THE LINES.
AND THERE'S NO ONE WRITES ONE BETTER.

GIDEON returns, determined that Prue get the important part right)

GIDEON

TELL HER: *(SINGS)* THE HARVEST HAS BEEN MIDDLEING
BESSIE'S DROPPED HER CALF, A HEIFER-

PRUE

Yes?

GIDEON

Tell Grimble—

I WILL BUY HIS LAMBS
IF THEY'RE PLUMP BETWEEN HIS HANDS
BUT THEY MUST NOT COME WITH FOOT ROT!

GIDEON & PRUE

YES, THEY MUST NOT COME WITH FOOT ROT!

(KESTER at Grimble's appears in spot, reading and with pen and ink making notes of his reading. He wears a bandage but his bite wounds are nearly healed. JANCIS enters, exhausted and sleepy.

JANCIS

Weaver, can you write for me to Gideon? I'm bone-tired.

KESTER

Tell me quickly what you want to say.

JANCIS

I want to chide Gideon for not writing back to say we mun wed. But I dunna dare.

KESTER *(nods agreement)*

Gideon Sarn does not strike me as a man who profits from chiding.

JANCIS

SAY WHAT WILL MOVE HIM TO REMEMBER ME AND LOVE ME!

SAY SOMETHING LIKE---

KESTER *echoes Jancis's song line, writing letter*

MY DEAREST DARLING SWEETHEART

I BIN WORKING HARD A'FORE SUN UP-

WITH THE MILKING OF THE COWS

AND THE FEEDING OF THE SOWS

I JUST WORK AND WORK TILL I'M DONE UP... *(FALLS ASLEEP)*

(lights come up on PRUE: stay on KESTER/JANCIS too)

PRUE

I CAN SEE THE TWO OF YOU WRITING

YOUR YELLOW HAIR AND PRETTY FACE BENT DOWN

AND WEAVER SWEETLY SMILING--

MAYBE T'WERE BETTER IF HE'D FROWN!

DON'T YOU DARE TO FALL IN LOVE WITH ANYONE BUT ME!

(JANCIS wakes from a dream)

JANCIS *(dictates)*

DON'T YOU DARE TO FALL IN LOVE WITH ANYONE BUT ME! *(KESTER nods and writes)*

ALL

DON'T YOU DARE TO FALL IN LOVE WITH ANYONE BUT ME!

KESTER

More?

JANCIS *(Looks at paper)*

You wrote all that so quick?

KESTER

So much paper to fill. It costs the same to send, whether the words be many or few.

JANCIS *(KESTER writes as Jancis sings)*

I WAS MORTAL TIRED, BUT NOW I SIT
AND AS WEAVER WRITES, I SMILE A BIT
THINKING ... *(she is stuck for words, begins to doze)*

KESTER *(fills in, writes)*

THINKING OF YOUR MANLY AIR
AND YOUR STRENGTH BEYOND COMPARE... *(Jancis rouses to add a few more words)*

JANCIS

AND SUCH STRONG HANDS... *(KESTER finishes, amused; Jancis dozes)*

KESTER

AND A QUICK WIT!

PRUE

TELL WEAVER WHEN HE GOES BY HUGELET
THAT HE MIGHT AS WELL CARRY A GUN.

KESTER

YES, HE HAD A NEAR SHAVE AT THE DOG FIGHT
BUT HE SAYS HE'S NOT AFRAID, BY GUM!
AND HE SAYS THAT THE WOMAN WHO SAVED HIS LIFE
COULD BE THE KIND OF WOMAN HE'D LIKE FOR HIS WIFE. *(Jancis wakes)*

JANCIS & PRUE

YOU BE MY DEAREST LOVE, MY SHINING LIGHT

PRUE & KESTER & JANCIS

ONE I'D WILLINGLY DIE FOR, EVEN IF BY DOG BITE!
(ADD GIDEON) MAY WE HAVE A MERRY CHRISTMAS! AND SO GOODNIGHT.

Months later. Sarn House. Dusk.

(MOTHER looks up as PRUE enters trying not to wake her.)

MOTHER *(chiding PRUE, and shivering)*

Aye, Mister Woodseaves be gone away home! I was afeerd you'd stay out all night. Sat there drinking his tea, waiting to thank you.

PRUE

Mother, you're shivering! Be you not well?

MOTHER

I'm right enough, for now. Though 'tween the cough and the rheumatics I've not long. A mother wants to see her daughter settled afore--

PRUE

I will ne're be settled! I amna like other girls. I dunna mind that. Nor should you.

MOTHER

Two-three months not even to go to market at Lullingford- like you're shamed by what you done!
(points to bench where Kester waited for Prue)
So strong and so considerate. Any woman would be proud to have Weaver for a son!

PRUE

O, Mother! What did you say to him?

MOTHER

I told 'un I'd got the best daughter in the world, with such pleasant ways; and one as can write the tall script and the short, and even words of four synnables.

PRUE

Did you tell him I'm hareshotten?

MOTHER

What for should I do that? There's gossips enough in Lullingford! Should you care yourself if Weaver had but one leg, or was all pitted with the smallpox?

PRUE

Care, Mother? I should love 'un the more for it! *(Prue looks frightened by her admission)*

MOTHER

I knowed you loved him, m' dear. And I'm right glad.

HE KNOWS JUST WHO YOU ARE.
HE KNOWS YOU FROM AFAR.
HE HAS YOU IN HIS HEART.
WHY MUST YOU STAND APART?
ALTHOUGH HE HASN'T MET YOU,
I KNOW HE WON'T FORGET YOU.
IT'S COME TO ME - YOU'RE MEANT TO BE - TOGETHER.

PRUE

I canna live through the moment Weaver first sees my mouth.

MOTHER

RISK ALL, MY CHILD! AND YOU'LL FIND LOVE.
DON'T HIDE YOURSELF. DON'T RUN AWAY.
GO TOWARDS HIM! GO TOWARDS HIM!

I do believe all shall be well with you, Prue. You shall get love as well as give it.
HE HAS YOU IN HIS MIND

PRUE

I KNOW HE'S GOOD AND KIND.
BUT IF HE WERE TO FACE ME –
HE NEVER COULD EMBRACE ME!

MOTHER

MY DEAR, DON'T FRET IT.

PRUE

WE'D SURE REGRET IT.

MOTHER

IT'S COME TO ME -
YOU'RE MEANT TO BE -
TOGETHER.

PRUE

OH CANNA' YOU SEE –
WE'LL NEVER BE -
TOGETHER

PRUE

Be happy for me. I've had the letter-writing, and known him so.

MOTHER (*shivers again, goes out to inner room*)

My time's not long, now. But I know what I know. And oh, my dearest wish is to see you wed.

PRUE (*calling after Mother*)

Oh, you' ll soon be well and strong again, mother! (GIDEON enters)

GIDEON

I'm in behopes she will, for there's a mort of work that needs doing!

Sarn House, near Christmas

Lights up slowly on MOTHER hanging some Christmas greens, singing a Carol. PRUE joins her.

GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, REJOICE
WITH HEART AND SOUL AND VOICE
NOW YE HEAR OF ENDLESS BLISS
JOY! JOY! (*MOTHER goes out for more greens*)
JESUS CHRIST WAS BORN FOR THIS
HE HATH OPE'D THE HEAV'NLY DOOR
AND MAN IS BLESSED EVERMORE---

PRUE notices there is a feeble tapping on the door. JANCIS enters covered in snow and barely alive, falling to the floor. PRUE rushes to JANCIS, strips off her wet outer clothes and wraps her in blankets.

PRUE

Jancis, poor soul! You're cold as ice. Dinna tell me you've run away!

JANCIS

I couldna bear it! Dunna scold, or turn me out! However angered Gideon be, keep me for at least this night.

PRUE (*embraces her*)

Turn you out? In such weather? Rest and sup, m'dear. Your troubles are over.

JANCIS

Thankee, Prue. You bin like a Saviour to me.

(They hear GIDEON at the door, exchange looks. PRUE goes to stand between GIDEON & JANCIS.)

PRUE

Jancis is come.

GIDEON (*in a rage*)

Run away? She'll lose all the money! All the wages for the year and months she's worked! Of all the foolish--!

PRUE (*fierce: meeting his rage with hers*)

How can you think of that, when she's draggled and half dead! Here's Christmas, and Jancis come to you out of death's arms. Be grateful, and keep your tongue in leash!

GIDEON (*shocked to be opposed*)

What a spitfire! All in a minute. (*checking PRUE for attitude as he moves to JANCIS*)

Well. So you're back. And broke your time. (*JANCIS weeps*)

Now then, dunna cry. Prue'll give me some more tongue. How be you?

JANCIS (*trying to be brave*)

Better-- thankee kindly, Sarn.

GIDEON

Ye dinna do much credit at Grimble. Seen Young Camperdine, ever? (*JANCIS shakes her head*)

Got a sweetheart over yonder?

JANCIS

No, Sarn. You be my sweetheart, for ever and ever.

GIDEON

Not Alf Grimble?

JANCIS

Never! But Alf was sweet on me, a bit, and pestering. That's why for I ran away. You be the only sweetheart I ever want, Gideon.

GIDEON (*flattered and possessive*)

O, so that was it, was it? I'll break Alf's head for un!

JANCIS

No, dunna! Dunna.

GIDEON

You ran all those miles because you dunna like Alf, and I was your sweetheart! Give us a kiss, wench! (*Kisses her. MOTHER enters with greens, PRUE goes to her.*)

GIDEON and JANCIS are lost in their embrace and don't notice them.)

PRUE

Jancis is run away. Walked all the way, she did.

MOTHER

Dear to Goodness! But why didna she go home?

PRUE

Afraid of Beguildy? Sure, we can baffle him.

MOTHER (*sneaking a peek*)

There they are loving. I'm right glad. It's never too early. (*MOTHER & PRUE laugh with joy*)

JANCIS (*noticing*)

Missis Sarn?

MOTHER (*hugging her*)

There, there, my dear. Set your heart at rest.

JANCIS

What will Father do to me—? If you go agin his plans he's very crousty.

MOTHER

We'll think of summat to give you time to turn round. Or maybe— Gideon?

GIDEON

Wed her? Next fall. I'll sell a huge crop of corn, and be rich enough.

MOTHER

If you be fond of a girl you mun want her to be your wife.

MISSIS BEGUILDY (*at the door, frantic*)

Missus Sarn! Missus Sarn! I hear tell Jancis is run away!

MOTHER

She be safe here at Sarn, m'dear!

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Thanks be to Goodness! Jancis, dear, you mun hide till after Christmas when the worst'll have worn off. (*to others*) Her Father's still set on selling her to Young Camperdine.

PRUE

So we mun find her work somewheres.

JANCIS

I love you, Prue. And I think there be a certain Weaver who loves you too.

MOTHER

It be Christmas and I've a mind to be singing.

GOOD CHRISTIAN MEN, REJOICE

WITH HEART AND SOUL AND VOICE..... (FADE)

Dragonfly Meadow. *Backdrop projections change: Fields of grain sprouting, growing, rippling and ripening as time passes; dragonflies and blossoms*

REPRISE of TURN #2 CHORUS

TURN, TURN, FOREVER TURN,
THE SEASONS PASS AWAY;
THE SUMMER'S COME AND THE WEATHER'S BEEN SWEET
FOR THE BARLEYCORN AND HAY.

FARMER

THE SUN AND THE RAIN TOGETHER
HAVE KISSED THE FIELDS AND FARM.

GIDEON

WITH CROPS SO RICH AND PROMISING
THEY'VE RIPENED SAFE FROM HARM. *(THEY EXIT)*

CHORUS *(as they go off)*

THE CORN, THE CORN, THE STANDING CORN
LIKE A GREAT MERE UNDER THE WIND.
WAVING GREEN, THEN PALE, THEN GOLD -
GLOWING LIKE THE SUN'S WITHIN. *(KESTER ENTERS AND WATCHES PRUE TENDERLY)*

PRUE

THE MERE IS BRIGHT WITH LILIES:
SNOW WHITE AND BRILLIANT GOLD
AND DRAGONFLIES ALL HOVERING,
THEY'RE READY TO UNFOLD!

On angel wings!

(PRUE senses KESTER behind her, starts as if to run away. He puts his gentle hand on PRUE's shoulder.)

KESTER

What? Run away? For why, Prue Sarn? *(PRUE keeps her face turned away from him and tries to pull away, but he holds her, laughing)*

A funny way to treat a man who comes to thank you kindly for saving his life -- to take off and try to jump in the lake! *(pause)* What were you looking at just then? A damsel fly?

PRUE

We call them dragonflies. It's the season for them. *(points)* Look, there's one right there - on that tall rush by the bank.

THE DRAGONFLY - KESTER
COMING OUT OF ITS SHROUD. THE BRIGHT DRAGONFLY.
A MIRACLE OF OLD. HOW BRAVELY! TO UNFOLD--
FIGHTING FOR FLIGHT - TO MAKE IT RIGHT.
IT COSTS A GREAT DEAL, TO BREAK THE PAINFUL SEAL. TO GET FREE.
TO BE REAL TO BE REAL.
BUT OUT, IS OUT FOR GOOD. IT'S FLYING AS YOU SHOULD.

PRUE & KESTER

SO HIGH – IN THE SKY - DRAGONFLY!

KESTER

We'd all like to do that, I reckon-- if we could choose our Paradise to fly in. Prue, I dunna weave for Grimble any more, and there's others here who would as lief not employ me. I reckon I mun go off to London for a year, to learn coloured weaving for the fancy work, the made-to-order--

PRUE

A year's a long time to be hivver hovering.

KESTER (*laughs*)

You write a damned good letter, Prue.

PRUE

The letters were Gideon's.

KESTER

You wrote those letters. You made 'em up. All I can say is, the man you were thinking of when you said those things is a lucky man.

PRUE

I hanna got a sweetheart.

KESTER

I'm bound to ask you: at the dog fight? Why did you risk your life to save me?

PRUE

It was only that-- I was your angel for that day. And a poor daggly angel, too!

KESTER

Daggly or not, you've got a friend, Prue. You write in your book that Kester Woodseaves is your friend forever. Till Time stops.

PRUE

How do you know about my book?

KESTER

There's not much that I dunna know about you, Prudence Sarn. I'm right sorry I'll be gone to London-- I'd like to dance with you at Harvest Home.

(Kester tries to turn her around into dance position. PRUE shrinks away, imagining the reaction of the crowd to her Devil's Mark. Then she turns and faces KESTER, but keeps her hand in front of her face)

PRUE *(fierce)*

I dunna dance! I amna like other girls!

(Prue drops her hand, exposing her harelip. But rather than opening her eyes to see his reaction she blindly dashes away, weeping and scrambling as she goes)

KESTER *(calls after her)*

Write to me, Prue! I'll write to you!

Harvest Home --- near Sarn House, early evening

Fiddle plays as lights come up on neighbours dancing.

TWIRL WITH YOUR LADDIE! TWIRL WITH HIM, LASS
BOW AND CURTSY AS YOU PASS
NO NEED NOW TO MOPE OR MOAN
AS YOU DRINK TO THE CORN AT HARVEST HOME!
TWIRL THAT LASSIE- BRING HER HOME.

THE CORN, THE CORN, THE HARVEST CORN
IN RICK AND WAIN IT STANDS!
WHAT'S SOWN IS RIPE AND GOOD AS GOLD
WHEN GATHERED WITH OUR HANDS. *(APPLAUSE, CHEERS, CROWD INTERACTION)*

NEIGHBOR #1

Come to dine at the Devil's Table, have you?

NEIGHBOR #2

Only eat what I see the witch or her brother eat -- but a-plenty of that, and wine and cider!

NEIGHBOR #1

Crafty man! Sup with the Devil, but bring a long spoon.

NEIGHBOR #2

Even Sarns can't poison the whole parish!

PREACHER (*calling crowd to order*)

God bless the corn and the Master of Sarn. May his good deeds return to him as the doves to the mountains! People, (*sings*)

LET US GIVE THANKS FOR OUR DAILY BREAD.

CHORUS

WE GIVE THANKS TO THE LORD. AMEN.

PREACHER

Neighbors, Sarn's had a good harvest, and I ask you for why? Because he's industrious, people! And his mother's industrious, and his sister's industrious--

NEIGHBOR #2 (*aside*)

Always busy —spreading fear and blight!

PREACHER

We know as God gives to them who sow for themselves the reaping: and when we look at all them grand ricks of grain I'm sure we see it's true. Sarn?

GIDEON

I HAVE WORKED THIS LAND, EVERY FIELD IN SIGHT.

I HAVE PLOWED BY DAY, I HAVE PLOWED BY NIGHT.

I KNEW A CORN TAX WAS COMIN', SO IT'S CORN I DID GROW.

CORN IN THE RICK YARD, AND IN THE WOODS BELOW.

WITH SOME HELP FROM YOU, I DID WHAT I MEANT TO DO!

Let every man who's lent a hand claim task work of me till I've paid my debt. (*cheers*)

PREACHER

In three days we'll all come back to Sarn for his wedding randy. May it bring more prosperation and not less! Though knowing where his young woman comes from, and what's bred in the bone-

TIVVY

Grimbles can testify: Jancis is na' so industrious!

CALLARD

Now, now: Jancis Beguildy's a good girl, and has been a faithful maid to us these ten months -- binna that so, Missis Callard? (*YOUNG CAMPERDINES enter*)

MISSIS CALLARD

Indeed she is. Good as gold.

SAMMY

And the prettiest lass in Shropshire! (*cheers*)

YOUNG CAMPERDINE

A toast to the couple, and good luck to the corn! If you'll give us a mug of Harvest ale.

NEIGHBOR #2 (*aside*)

The witch's brother and the Wizard's spawn. What a match!

DORABELLA (*drinks off the mug Mother brings her*)

Health and prosperation, Sarn! (*offers hand, Sarn shakes; CHORUS begins to disperse*)

YOUNG CAMPERDINE

I thought Beguildy'd be here? I don't see --

MOTHER

He was called away.

MISSIS BEGUILDY (*sharing conspiratorial smiles*)

A sudden sickness of my cousin away past Lullingford. But if you'd come today a week --

YOUNG CAMPERDINE (*agrees, exits*)

Today a week. Tell him he's to raise Venus again for me-- for twice what I paid before!

PRUE (*leading Mother in*)

Take you to bed, Mother. I'll clean up what must be done.

MOTHER

I'll be dreaming on the next wedding; the one between the best of daughters and the kindest, brightest of men.

PRUE

That man be far away in London town. I hanna even had a letter to tell me where to write. Gideon says Weaver has enemies in Lullingford, and dare na' ever come back --

MOTHER (*looking back at Gideon*)

Pay no mind to Gideon! He doesna love us as he should. (*goes into house*)

GIDEON (*to Missis B*)

Mother, leave Jancis bide the night over, as so soon we'll be wed. Her's willing. (*women blush*)

MISSIS BEGUILDY (*a little in love with Gideon herself*)

"Mother" is it, son? Well, you take care, my dears.

(JANCIS and GIDEON go inside. PRUE comes out, looking at the lovers with a kind of bittersweet admiration. MISSIS B smiles.)

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Ah, it sets me thinking of my own courting time, afore I wed Beguildy. What a proper handsome man he was! Though you'd never think it, the grutching wicked old thing he is now. Well. He is'na like to be back afore day after tomorrow. Give y' good night.

PRUE (*SINGS.*)

I HAD A WAKING DREAM
OF A CROWD COME TO SARN MERE.
THEIR CLOTHES WERE BRIGHT AND GAY,
BUT THEIR LOOKS WERE OF HATE AND FEAR.
THE WEAVER ON A TALL BROWN HORSE
CAME A RIDING BY AND BY.
THEN A PRETTY YOUNG LASS DECKED IN GREEN GLASS BEADS
WITH A GRASS-GREEN SPARKLING EYE---
CRIED OUT: TAKE ME! TAKE MY BODY!
TAKE ME! TAKE MY BODY, ON YOUR SADDLE FOR TO RIDE!

BUT THE HORSEMAN TURNED AWAY FROM HER
TO ONE WHO STOOD NEARBY.
SHE WAS A LASS WITH A HARESHOTTEN LIP
AND A GLANCE THAT WAS SO SHY.
SHE WOULD HAVE LET HER LOVE SLIP BY
BUT THE HANDSOME WEAVER CAUGHT HER EYE,

AND HE STOPPED! YES HE STOPPED!
YES, HE STOPPED FOR HER ALONE.
AND HE CRIED: "COME LASS! COME AND RIDE WITH ME!
COME, LASS! COME AND RIDE WITH ME.
I WANT YOU FOR MY OWN!

(BEGUILDY runs up, batters on the house, yelling. MISSIS BEGUILDY chases along behind, trying to stop him. PRUE shakes off her trance, to realize that this is not a dream. She looks on, dazed.)

BEGUILDY

Sarn! Damn you, Sarn! Jancis, you foolish wench, get dressed and come home. This lad dunna love you! All he cares for is his own will ! Once he gets his way, you and all the rest can go hang! Well, I'll not allow it. Sarn! You shanna have my daughter! I curse you by fire! I curse you to be poor in life and die in the water!

(GIDEON comes out, barely dressed; JANCIS cowering behind him.)

GIDEON

Pity. Harvest be in and I be a rich man.

BEGUILDY

Binna be a hundredth part as rich as Young Squire Camperdine! You shanna have her, I say!

GIDEON

Seems like I've got her. *(BEGUILDY grabs a pitchfork and tries to kill GIDEON. WOMEN scream. GIDEON blocks the pitchfork and knocks BEGUILDY out cold.)*

GIDEON

Wrap him in this blanket, Mother. Cart him home and keep him quiet.

PRUE

I'll do it. You see to Jancis. *(helps to carry BEGUILDY to cart)*

GIDEON *(calling after them)*

If I die for it, I'll not be disturbed any more this night.

(leads JANCIS in. MISSIS BEGUILDY & PRUE come to the edge of the stage)

MISSIS BEGUILDY

Thanks be to God the wedding is but three days away! That'n can be deadly. You mun tell your brother to keep a sharp watch.

PRUE

What harm can an old man like that do, with his foolish curses and spells?

MISSIS BEGUILDY *(exits)*

You keep a sharp watch.

PRUE *(shivering, calls after)*

Wind's come up. Hurry on home. And give 'un some of his sleeping-potion when you get there!

PRUE sits down with her shawl wrapped around her, but falls quickly asleep. A red glow and plumes of smoke creep around the house.

PRUE *(waking)*

Fire! Fire! Wake up! Come out! We mun save house and stock! Fire! Fire!

(GIDEON comes out with a terrible roar, takes shovel and works)

PRUE *(to MOTHER and JANCIS as they stumble out)*

Mother, loose the animals, they mun run for the woods. Jancis, fetch water from the mere -- No, no! -- beat this bucket and run toward's Preacher's, yelling "fire"! We mun have help!

(throws water from the bucket onto the roof, and then dashes a ladle against the bucket as if beating a gong. JANCIS beats bucket)

CHORUS *(offstage)*

BURN, BURN, THE CORN WILL BURN; THE BARLEY, OATS, AND HAY.

THE FLAMES THAT EAT THE GOLDEN WHEAT WILL MELT HIS WEALTH AWAY.

JANCIS *(heading off)*

Fire! Fire! Help! Fire! *(continues ad lib)*

MISSIS BEGUILDY *(runs up)*

Wizard got away! I'm afeerd he--! *(PREACHER and TIVVY & SAMMY enter running)*

SAMMY *(Heads to mere. MISSIS PREACHER straggles in)*

Burning and the fuel of fire! Get buckets to fill from the mere!

MISSIS BEGUILDY *(follows him)*

I'll help. If all who were here turn back to fetch water--

SAMMY

I saw Miller: he willna come. He says it's the curse, and there's no fighting it--

PREACHER *(shows tinderbox)*

'Twas arson! Not a spell or charm: but the fruits of wickedness.

MISSIS PREACHER

We saw the Wizard running past, and he dropped that tinderbox!

GIDEON

Beguilty done this! I'll kill him with my bare hands!

PREACHER

No! You must fight the fire. Constable will arrest Beguilty.

(MISSIS BEGUILDY screams. They are forming into a bucket brigade to pour enough water over the house to save it)

MOTHER

Tis the curse! Curse of the sin you did eat, Gideon.

CHORUS *(sings)*

HE TOOK THE SINS OF HIS FATHER, HIS FATHER--
NOW THE SIN'S ON HIM.

PRUE

Save the house and barn, Gideon! You can't murder your wife's father. Jancis will--

GIDEON

What wife? I have no wife!

TIVVY

Child of the Devil's Wizard? Beguilty did this, he summoned all the flames of hell--!

MOTHER

The poor child loves you, son. Your heart canna be so hard!

GIDEON

A granite mountain isn't as hard. That Wizard's girl comes nigh me, I'll tromple on her life! Like I would a rat.

PRUE

But you've been as good as wed to her all summer, Gideon. Suppose a baby comes?

GIDEON

I'll strangle it! Foul, foxy vermin. They're not fit to live.

CHORUS

BURN, BURN, THE CORN'S ALL BURNED
THE BARLEY OATS AND HAY
THE FLAMES THAT EAT THE GOLDEN WHEAT
DEVoured HIS HEART TODAY!

months later: Kester, in London, is writing to Prue

(writing at a desk in spotlight.)

KESTER *(writes, throws pen down in frustration, sighs)*

"Dearest Friend"— Ahh! What's the use of writing, when no word from you comes back to me? Prue! My heart tells me you are alive, but suffering. Why dunna you write? Has that brother of yours forbid it? Has he locked you up, or thrown out your ink? Only a little longer and I can come to you and say what I feel!

THY LIFE'S COMPANION
THAT'S WHAT I'D BE TO THEE:
CLOSER THAN BROTHER,
LOVER OR FRIEND.

I WANT NO OTHER
TO WALK BESIDE ME,
TO HOLD AND GUIDE ME
TO SHARE MY DAILY BREAD—
TILL MY LIFE'S END.

Or is it that you dunna trust me? I swore to be your friend forever, Prue. But I could be so much more...

(music continues to underscore as spot fades on KESTER and comes up on Sarn House near dawn, where PRUE is writing to Kester by lantern light.)

PRUE *(writing her letter)*

.....And yet with all these woes that I have told you, Dear Friend, please find herein a hempen shirt. They say if you wear it will protect you from chin-cough. I spoke a few old righteous charms as I sewed it, but no unrighteous ones. The ice on the Mere melts now on bright days, and my heart tells me all is well with you. Like spring and dragonflies, you will return.

(Cross fade back to Kester; he sings:)

KESTER

AND WHEN THE SPRING'S UPON US
WE'LL WATCH THE DRAGONFLIES
UNFOLD BEFORE OUR EYES.
EVER A SURPRISE! *(back to Prue, music continues ...)*

PRUE *(writing)*

Goodnight for now, and God send you happy. Yours obediently-- *(Gideon enters)* Gideon?

GIDEON

I'm off to Lullingford.

PRUE (*hands him the letter*)

Take this letter to the mail-coach, please?

GIDEON

Be these new markings Woodseaves' lodgings?

PRUE

His cousin's. I dunna know if it'll reach Weaver. But to London it must go.

(Gideon looks disapproving. Prue hands him coins)

Mother gave me her pin money to pay.

(Gideon nods and exits with letter and lantern. Fade on interior)

KESTER (*sings*)

BE MY COMPANION

BE MY DARLING, BE MY WIFE!

BELIEVE WE'RE MEANT TO SHARE/ ONE LIFE.

Outside Sarn House we see Gideon burn Prue's letter in the lantern's flame as the lights fade

Bitter Winter (SARN HOME)

PRUE (*at MOTHER's bedside*)

Not sleeping, m'dear? I warmed you a posset. (*gives drink*). I would sit with you, but you know Gideon will have me up before dawn. He's starting the ploughing again.

MOTHER

Ah, that bitter old ploughing!....And it may be that all the corn will be burnt like the last. No wedding. Dear Jancis and her mother gone afar off. How will they keep body and soul together?

PRUE

Dunna be worrit, Mother.

MOTHER

I am worrit! An' Jancis be carrying Gideon's babe, who will tell me of it? Not Gideon!

PRUE (*hesitates, then..*)

Sukey heard that they be staying with a cousin not far from where the Wizard is in prison, and that a babe may be born in the spring-- but I know not if it be true. If it is, we mun hope that Gideon has a change of heart.....

MOTHER

He has no heart! He'll never let my hold my grand baby. Only the pigs to tend again come the spring! It may be I willna live to see it. I'm very middling, Prue.

PRUE

I mun tell Gideon to send for the doctor.

MOTHER *(weeps)*

Dunna tell him! Dunna let my son Sarn near me. He'll make feel as I'm a burden.

PRUE

There, there. Dunna worry. A burden borne for love can be a blessing. I'll go myself.

MOTHER

You mun sleep and plow, or Gideon will--

PRUE

I'll go after midnight, and be back by mid-morning. *(MOTHER protests)* There's a full moon; I willna get lost. Try to sleep, m'dear. *(PRUE puts on bonnet and shawl, starts to leave.)*

MOTHER

Prue? Have you heard from Weaver?

PRUE

No, Mother. I've written to him, but no answer has come back to me.

MOTHER

Don't give up hope, m'dear. *(Prue exits, bed spot narrows. MOTHER sings "Together")*

IT'S COME TO ME / YOU'RE MEANT TO BE / TOGETHER

(Lights dim, the brighten to daylight: music segue: time has passed)

Doctor has come to Sarn House

MOTHER's bed, DOCTOR at her side, TIVVY and GIDEON watching. PRUE slips inconspicuously into the scene as soon as she is able to get there from the end of previous Scene

DOCTOR *(feeling Mother's pulse)*

Her'll do well enough, an' you cosset her. Could last 10 more year.

GIDEON

Ten year like this? Of no use?

DOCTOR *(holds up vial of foxglove tincture)*

Why, what use could she be? You mun give her some foxglove in tea, for her heart. Not too much: too much can kill. *(indicates dose of drops)* Six drops. You see? *(gives GIDEON vial)*

PRUE *(indicates her understanding)*

Like the Precious Bane. The right amount heals, too much is poison.

DOCTOR

I'd best be on my way. I've a patient with ague over past the mill.

PRUE *(Gives the DOCTOR his coat.)*

I'll walk you to the path. *(they go out the door, talking quietly. GIDEON puts the medicine vial on the table, sits in "his" chair and with a look of despair. TIVVY hands him a mug of cider, rubs his back and shoulders as he drinks.)*

TIVVY *(to GIDEON)*

You need a wife to serve up temptuous dishes. Keep up your strength. I like a big man, arms with great lumps of muscle-- and hard. That's the man Preacher's Tivvyriah would be a right good missis to!

GIDEON

Seems to me as what you'd be is m' Mother's nurse.

TIVVY

Only for a while.

GIDEON *(shrugs her off, gruffly)*

Ten year.

TIVVY gets MOTHER's tea cup, pours in tea. As TIVVY turns to get a spoonful of honey, GIDEON pours in an overdose of foxglove. TIVVY stirs the tea and carries it to MOTHER, as GIDEON goes to the far corner of the room, where he becomes very interested in sharpening his axe. Outside, PRUE is returning to the house when she meets MISSIS PREACHER, hurrying up with a package.

MISSIS PREACHER

Prue! I brung this for you, Prue. The Host at the Mug O' Cider says it's bin waiting there since New Year's. Dunna know for why Sarn didna fetch it for you hisself.

(PRUE takes the package: instant joy!)

PRUE

A thousand thanks for this, Missis! *(she opens the package and takes out the letter)*

From Weaver!

TIVVY gives tea to Mother who drinks it slowly with mild thanks and then begins to show the effects of poison. MISSIS PREACHER enters, calls "Tivvyriah!" TIVVY greets her mother in pantomime.

PRUE (*reads KESTER'S letter aloud as "Companion" music plays*)

"My dear Friend Prue Sarn, I can weave three colors now, as you can see by the sample."

(Prue takes the cloth out of the package and kisses it)

"The women here are poor things, pale and small. I talk to you constantly in my mind, Prue. I would write to you every day, if only I were sure my words were welcome..."

(PRUE calls out joyously)

Mother! It's from Weaver! Gideon, he says he's bin waiting for a letter of mine-- and asks why I haven't answered?! Why dinna you deliver this package to me? And what did you do with my letters? Did you hand them off to the mail coach, or no?

GIDEON

What's the use of letters? Weaver may like you well enough when you're not face to face, but --! Even if he did want you, you took an oath to stay here and obey me.

TIVVY (*worried, calls to Prue*)

Prue, your mother's taken a turn for the worse! Best come.

(Prue goes to Mother, Gideon does not)

PRUE (*to Tivvy*)

What's the matter with her?

TIVVY

She's gone ever so quiet. I can scarce hear her breathe.

GIDEON

She's bin sinking near a year.

PRUE

She binna! She were sinking, when you mun send her out to tend pigs in the mud! But since she took to her bed she's been getting stronger by the day.

GIDEON

She mun sink again, will she na? If she were to go it would be a release.

PRUE

Go? Oh, no! She mustna'. Mother, please! Wake up. Talk to me.

MOTHER (*wryly, dying*)

A bitter brew. Gideon--

PRUE (*sobbing*)

Mother! Dear, dear, Mother. Oh, please, mother-- dunna you leave me!

(PRUE sobs over mother's body as MISSIS PREACHER sniffs at the tea cup and looks from Gideon to TIVVY)

TIVVY

Gideon--? (*GIDEON says nothing. He looks at TIVVY*)

PRUE

Gideon? (*his face is set in a mask of stony determination. TIVVY goes to him and links his arm in hers. Prue looks lost and blank. She cannot make sense of what is happening*)

Jancis comes to Sarn House. *Spring backdrop*

Music from the Spring section of "Listen to the Sounds of Sarn Mere"

GIDEON sits sharpening his axe, while PRUE and TIVVY work in gloomy silence. JANCIS enters pale and frail as an apparition, dressed in tattered white finery. TIVVY and PRUE are frozen in shock as JANCIS kneels and places her tiny baby on the floor in front of GIDEON.

JANCIS

Sarn? Sarn? Do you mind how we played Conquer down by the water, and I lost? Do you mind how we danced to "My Laddie"? In the dairy once you said I was made of May and Milk--

GIDEON

It were long ago. Time out of mind.

JANCIS

But the baby!

GIDEON (*rising, axe in hand*)

That? Why, if it lives, which I doubt, it'll never be no good but to coddle about the house. No Sarn ever born was such a pitiful mewling thing. (*baby wails*) You binna wanted here. Neither the one nor the other. (*GIDEON exits*)

PRUE (*embracing Jancis*)

Now lookee, Jancis m'dear, you need a bite and sup. Tivvy, be a good girl and warm some milk for the baby. Whatever was your mother thinking to let you walk and carry him—?

JANCIS (*picks up the baby*)

Mother's dead.

PRUE

O, no, m'dear! How did it happen?

JANCIS

Mother died of grief and shame. How else?

PRUE

Well, your home's here now, Jancis. Baby's too.

JANCIS

Not if Sarn dunna love me.

PRUE

Aye, but it is! Though I swore on the Bible to obey my brother, yet in this I'll say him nay. You shall lie in my bed tonight, and this be your home from now on.

TIVVY

Here, Prue Sarn? I say not. Maybe you don't know I mean to wed Sarn myself. (*indicates her blossoming pregnancy*) He's got to.

PRUE

I know it'd be well for you, Tivvy, if he did wed you-- and best not be too long about it, neither. But will he? I canna see how it would be good for Gideon in any way to marry you.

TIVVY

So you say! But I know what was in the tea he made for his mother. Foxglove enough to kill her! My mother knows, too-- she smelled the cup. (*JANCIS and PRUE look at each other, shocked*) You believe it, I can see! If Sarn dunna marry me, we'll tell everyone.

JANCIS

It was foreboded. I've no home, no home on all this earth. What shall us do, baby?

TIVVY

Stop the night here and you'll see Sarn hang, Jancis Beguildy! And his sister the Devil-marked witch along of him--!

PRUE (*attacks TIVVY, and drives her out*)

Go! Go, you cruel wench! Afore I maul you. I never hated anyone afore, but you--! Out! Out with you! (*TIVVY runs off howling*)

PRUE

Now you lie still and rest, m'dear, while I go to Gideon.

JANCIS

Dunna worrit Sarn, Prue. But I'll rest. Baby and me's both in need of rest. *(PRUE exits)*
(Jancis gathers up the baby, cooing or humming to soothe him, and slips out as lights cross fade)

Outside Sarn House *(Gideon is at work. Prue confronts him)*

PRUE

Tivvy says you gave Mother poison. Be it true?

GIDEON

Mother told me herself she'd liefer be dead. She was a burden.

PRUE

Well, you be a murderer, and I've done with you.

GIDEON

You swore--

PRUE

MURDER CANCELS ALL VOWS.
I VOWED TO OBEY MY BROTHER, GIDEON SARN.
THOUGH YOU WERE ONCE MY BROTHER
WHILE WE SHARED A MOTHER
HER MURDER CANCELS ALL VOWS!
YOU PROVED YOU ARE NO SON TO HER
BY THE WICKED THING YOU'VE DONE TO HER
THE LIVING LINK OF BLOOD AND BONE
IS BROKEN NOW. WE'RE BOTH ALONE.
YOUR MURDER'S CANCELLED ALL.

PRUE

What for did you do such wicked things? You mun repent in dust and ashes, or go to the lowest Hell. And you mun begin by taking in these poor souls now: you owe Jancis, and the baby.

GIDEON

Jancis has gone back where she come from. I saw her walking out.

PRUE

What? Get up. Come! We mun find her. She's got no money; her mother's dead, her father's in jail! Where could she go? God help us: the Mere? (*MERE MUSIC RISES*)

GIDEON (*angry, slamming down his axe*)

Mean to frighten me, do you?

(PRUE runs to the water's edge, finds a baby's bootie floating, holds it up with a cry of anguish. She and GIDEON begin to pull the wet bodies out as the lights fade to black.)

Sarn House: Gideon is haunted .

GIDEON enters, looking very upset: then is frightened by the figure in the chair-Prue.

GIDEON (*accusing*)

What for do y' sit there the like of that, making game like you're Mother? I thought you were mother. She always sat there to card wool.

PRUE

Well, I canna help that. But why were you in a taking? Before you saw me?

GIDEON

I was working by the hedge, when she came to me all in white.

PRUE

Who came? Mother?

GIDEON

Jancis. Always Jancis.

PRUE

Dunna ask her to come, and she willna.

GIDEON (*a glimpse of Jancis' ghost*)

I DUNNA ASK. WHY DOES SHE COME TO ME?
SHE RISES SLOWLY UP FROM THE MUDDY MERE,
A SHADOW IN THE MIST. THEN HER FACE APPEARS
SHE REACHES OUT -- AS IF SHE MEANS TO SAY:
"DON'T BE A'FEERED. I KNOW THE WAY."

PRUE

Set your mind on other things.

GIDEON

What things?

PRUE

What you began. Riches. The house.

GIDEON

I dunna remember for why I wanted it.

PRUE

Tivvy'd like to go to the Hunt Ball in a silk gown. I'm sure she would.

GIDEON

I'd liefer hang. I like a little woman. Fair, like May and milk. I see 'em there, in the water-- she's carrying the babe. I hear her, too-- don't you?

(As GIDEON sings, JANCIS sings softly in counterpoint)

SHE DOES NOT SLEEP. SHE WILL NA' REST.

THE BABY CLINGING TO HER COLD AND EMPTY BREAST.

WHAT DO THEY WANT FROM ME?

I'VE NOTHING GOOD TO GIVE.

I WISH THEY'D GO, AND LET ME LIVE.

PRUE

Well, come and be a bit of company for me, then. I dunna hear Jancis. I've plenty to think about: not just the farm, but things from books. *(GIDEON doesn't respond. Sternly.)*

You was so good at Conquer. Well, now you mun play Conquer with your own thoughts.

GIDEON

You're making a game of me! Hell and the Hereafter-- that's how you soft ones play Conquer.

PRUE

I've no patience for games, Gideon. 'Tis time I was off on my own. If I weren't that worrit about you, I'd as lief leave you to deal with Tivvy.

GIDEON

What Jancis dunna like is me speaking unkind about the babe. Very touchy about her babe, is Jancis. *(GIDEON sees JANCIS' Ghost.)* Look! There be her footprints, and see, the water is dripping off her gown!

PRUE

There's nothing to see.

GIDEON

Not now. She's gone down into the mere. But-- She's singing.

(We hear JANCIS begin the song. Then GIDEON joins in, With JANCIS singing more softly in the background and Then fading out as GIDEON gets stronger.)

JANCIS

OH DANCE WITH ME LADDIE

WHERE THE WILD FLOWERS GROW.

GIDEON *(spoken)*

Do you hear her?

GIDEON and JANCIS

WE SHALL KISS IN THE MEADOW

AND TO CHURCH WE WILL NA' GO.

BUT ON ONE SHINING MORNING

I'LL TO CHURCH AND I'LL PRAY-

THAT MY SWEETHEART WILL BE WITH ME

FOR OUR OWN WEDDING DAY.

(GIDEON comes out of trance, starts to exit)

PRUE

Gideon. Don't go out there. Put your mind on--

GIDEON *(calm and in charge)*

Don't be worrit, Prue. Jancis smiled at me: she's not angry any more. I'm going out to see to the stock. Why dunna you set us out some bread and cheese for supper? If I'm late, put the key over the stable door.

PRUE looks after him, then begins to put out supper as the lights fade on the interior of Sarn house. GIDEON gets in the boat and rows off on the Mere as the voices of the offstage JANCIS and CHORUS are heard. There is a splash out in the Mere, and then the empty boat comes drifting toward the shore. PRUE comes out of the house into the fading sunset. Seeing the empty boat she cries out her brother's name.

PRUE

Gideon! Gideon!

(Segue music: "With a Turf")

Drown The Witch -- Finale. Field outside Sarn House

(PRUE has a strapped-up bundle of her belongings, sings the end of the funeral hymn)

YOUR GOODS DEEDS AND YOUR BAD ONES ALL
BEFORE THE LORD SHALL MEET

I fear for you, Gideon. On Judgement Day--

FELENA *(enters hurrying)*

I brung you what's been paid so far, Prue. *(hands over purse)* Callard bought most of your cows.
Hanna you had tidings from Weaver?

PRUE

There's scarce been time for him to answer since I wrote.

FELENA

Go then. I'll collect the rest of the money from the auction to keep for you.
(SUKEY enters, hurrying. Hareshotten music begins)

SUKEY

You mun go, Prue! I heard frightful whispering about you.

OFFSTAGE CHORUS

HARESHOTTEN! HARESHOTTEN!
HARESHOTTEN HARESHOTTEN
HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN.
HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN.
WHAT A SIGHT! SHE WILL BLIGHT YOU!
WHAT A SIGHT! SHE WILL BLIGHT YOU!

SUKEY

They're saying Sarn land is cursed and Grimble's telling everyone you're a witch and it was you
who brung down all the misfortune --

FELENA

Folks are right quick to think the worst. Some say I dance on Devil's mountain, and the rest --

CROWD *(more audible now, coming closer)*

KILLED HER BROTHER. MOTHER TOO.
KILLED HER BROTHER. MOTHER TOO.
KILLED HER BROTHER. MOTHER TOO.

KILLED HER BROTHER. MOTHER TOO.
STOP HER! STOP HER! STOP HER NOW! BEFORE SHE POISONS YOU!

TIVVY

People, all! Sarn promised to wed me, I should ha' been his Missis-- but she clouted me, Prue did! And being as she's a witch, I was afraid.

GRIMBLE

Prudence Sarn learned her wickedness off Beguildy! What she puts her evil eye on dwines and withers away. What did her mother die of? Poisoned! By Foxglove tea. Let Missis Preacher and Tivvyriah say if it be true! Aye?

TIVVY & MISSIS PREACHER

Aye! *(Crowd is stirred, murmurs /whispers dangerously)*

^TWO WOMEN
HARESHOTTEN

TWO MEN
HARESHOTTEN

CROWD

HERE'S A CREATURE MISBEGOTTEN

HUGELET *(VERY loud)*

Kill the witch! Kill the witch!

GRIMBLE

Who was with Jancis Beguildy when she and her babe met death by water? Prue Sarn!

TIVVY

She pushed them in, and her brother, too! *(her accusing finger points to Prue)*

PRUE

Tivvy, how can you tell such a wicked lie! You know very well I love my darling mother, and had nought to do with her death! All she wanted was to see me married and happy...!

TWO WOMEN *(over Prue's lines)*

STONE HER! DROWN HER!

TWO MEN

TIE HER UP! AND TROMPLE HER!

FELENA *(to her husband)*

Speak for her, man-- you know 'tis not so!

FELENA's HUSBAND

We darena. They'll be after you, next.

FELENA & CALLARDS

'TIS NOT TRUE! NOT OUR PRUE!
SHE'S A GOOD WOMAN, BETTER'N YOU!

SUKEY

OH, WHY CANNA' FOLK LIVE QUIET AND PEACEFUL?

FELENA

WHY MUST THEY HURT AND HARM ONE ANOTHER?

HUGELET (*loud as a thunderclap*)

SUFFER NOT A WITCH TO LIVE!

CROWD

MURDER WE CANNA FORGIVE!

PRUE (*as she is manhandled, over CHORUS singing*)

People! Tis not true! Look at me! I have a twisted lip, that's all. My heart is full of love, and some of you mun know it! Missis Preacher, your husband knows how many of the parish sick I've tended! Callard, Missis Callard, help me! (*sound of Kester's horse's hooves*)

CROWD

TIE HER UP AND LET HER DROWN.
WHERE SHE PUSHED THE OTHERS DOWN!

(Pushing PRUE towards the water, they sing the "Ahs" from the Sarn Mere music as KESTER, dismounted, runs towards them.)

KESTER (*pushing till the crowd falls back*)

O, you're having a fine randy, aren't ye? Grimble! This is to remind you to keep your nose out of everybody's business.

(Kester punches Grimble, whose nose bleeds as he retreats, whimpering, to exit. The fickle crowd laughs, willing to change sides.)

CROWD

A FIGHT! A FIGHT!
WE'LL HAVE SOME SPORT TONIGHT!

KESTER

Hugelet! Man, I could hear you hollering "witch" a mile away! I say she's not! She's my promised wife, and I'll wrestle you for God's truth on it!

CROWD

FOLKS, NOW MAKE A RING! GIVE THEM AIR!

FELENA (*cutting Prue's ropes, to husband*)

Help me! We mun free her, if they kill us for it!

WOMAN 1

GO HUGELET!

CALLARD

GO WEAVER! FIGHT FAIR!
THIS COIN SAYS THE WEAVER WINS.

WOMAN 1

BUT THE WITCH MUST DIE FOR HER SPELLS AND SINS.

CHORUS

SEE THEM STRUGGLE TO AND FRO
WHICH WILL STRIKE THE FINAL BLOW?

FELENA (*to Prue*)

Dunna worry. Weaver's tarrying for summat he has in mind...

CROWD

Oh! Oh! Hurrah!!

KESTER throws HUGELET into the Mere, with a great splash and a howl. The CROWD cheers, and gathers round KESTER, who embraces PRUE while HUGELET, covered in mud, drags himself out of the Mere. Laughter.

KESTER (*shouting off*)

Callard! What have you done with my horse?

CALLARD (*pops up with rein-ends*)

Got him right here, Mr. Woodseaves! (*laughter and cheering*)

PRUE

It's just as in my dream--- the water, the horse, and you--!

FELENA (*a look of longing towards Kester*)
I'd rather it was me riding off along a you!

PRUE (*as if reliving her dream*)
SHE WOULD HAVE LET HER LOVE SLIP BY
BUT THE WEAVER CAUGHT HER EYE, AND HE CRIED:

KESTER
COME LASS! COME AND RIDE WITH ME!
COME LASS! COME AND RIDE WITH ME,
I WANT YOU FOR MY OWN.

(KESTER tries to gather PRUE to him, but she resists)

PRUE
Kester Woodseaves! Are you sure it's me you want? Look at me.

KESTER
No more such talk, Prudence Sarn. I've found my bit of paradise.

(Kester tenderly, deliberately and with open eyes, kisses Prue's twisted lip. Spring! Dragonflies fill the air above the sparkling Mere)

KESTER
AND WHEN THE SPRING'S UPON US
WE'LL WATCH THE DRAGONFLIES
UNFOLD BEFORE OUR EYES.

PRUE
EVER A SURPRISE!

ENSEMBLE
EVER A SURPRISE!

PRUE AND KESTER
OUR OWN PARADISE.

ENSEMBLE
THEIR OWN PARADISE.

PRUE
FROM THE TIME I FIRST BEHELD YOU
LOVING YOU, I COULDNA' TELL YOU.
MY DEAR COMPANION,

THAT'S WHAT YOU'LL BE TO ME.

PRUE AND KESTER, ENSEMBLE
THROUGH RICHER OR POORER
THROUGH BETTER OR BAD.

PRUE KESTER
I'LL BE YOUR LOVING LASS / I'LL BE YOUR GALLANT LAD
WE'LL BE FOREVER TRUE.

PRUE AND KESTER, ENSEMBLE
TOGETHER: WE'RE/THEY'RE MEANT TO BE TOGETHER-

ENSEMBLE
TOGETHER

PRUE AND KESTER
TOGETHER. FOREVER. WITH YOU.

ENSEMBLE
AH AH AH, ETC.

The End.