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The Roses of Eyam

A Play

Don Taylor

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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CHARACTERS

William Mompesson, Rector of Eyam
Sir George Saville, his patron
Catherine Mompesson, his wife
His Two Small Children
The Bedlam
Old Unwin
Andrew Merrill
Marshall Howe
Thomas Stanley, former Rector of Eyam during the
Commonwealth
Rowland Torre, from the next village
George Vicars, the village tailor
Colonel Bradshaw, the local squire
Mrs Bradshaw
A Carter, from London

A Boy

Mrs Cooper
Edward Cooper
Jonathan Cooper

Mrs Sydall
Richard Sydall
Emmot Sydall
Ellen Sydall
Sarah Sydall
John Sydall

Humphrey Torre
Edytha Torre
William Torre
John Torre
Alice Torre
Scythe Torre
Thomas Torre
Frances Torre

Mrs Hancock
John Hancock
William Hancock
Alice Hancock
Elizabeth Hancock

Isaac Thornley
Edward Thornley
Elizabeth Thornley
William Thornley
Francis Thornley
Mary Thornley

George Frith
Frances Frith
Mary Frith
Francis Frith
Ann Frith
Thomas Frith
Elizabeth Frith

John Wilson
Deborah Wilson

Elizabeth Swanne

Lydia Chapman

Rowland Mower
George Mower

The Play was first performed at The Northcott Theatre,
Exeter, on September 23rd, 1970, by members of The
Northcott Theatre Company

Designed by Saul Radomsky
Directed by Anton Rodgers

The Play begins in August 1665, and ends in October
1666

“Ring a ring of roses,
A pocketful of posies,
A-tishoo, a-tishoo
All fall down”

To my Mother and Father, with thanks

ACT I

The set is a representation of the Derbyshire village of Eyam, in the seventeenth century. In a central position is a large Saxon cross, based on the cross in Eyam churchyard, with an open area round it

The setting must be flexible enough to be able to contain scenes located in various parts of the village, principally, the interior of the rectory, interiors of several Eyam cottages, the church, the open place round the cross where the villagers meet, areas of hillside around the village, and in Act III the little valley known as The Delf. The set must be designed to be permanent, so that each scene can flow continuously into the next without interruption

While the CURTAIN is down, music begins. When it rises, we see a silhouette, the village and the cross. Sir George Saville enters, followed by William Mompesson. They are both wearing travelling-clothes. The music stops

Saville Well, Mompesson? What does it feel like?

Mompesson What?

Saville Responsibility.

Mompesson Gratifying.

Saville I suppose I should have guessed you'd say that.

Mompesson I've waited ten years for today. I was sixteen when I promised myself to God's service. Ten years of hard study.

A pause. Mompesson looks round

It's small.

Saville Big enough for a beginner. You couldn't ask more of a first living.

Mompesson I'm grateful, of course. But I did hope . . .

Saville What? London?

Mompesson Lesser men have done it.

Saville I believe you. But if you're the man I think you are, your time here won't be wasted. I haven't done it without thought.

Mompesson I realize that.

Saville Ten years of Cambridge would suffice in a world made of books.

But scholarship isn't enough. You're in the world now, not your study.

You must become a man among men.

Mompesson A man of God among men.

Saville But men, not fellow scholars. Lead miners, copper workers, coopers, fieldsmen, tanners, men to whom words are drawings, and whose crosses you must witness. It will be a real test, William, don't undervalue it.

Mompesson No.

Saville You'll be unpopular at first.

Mompesson Why?

Saville Your age, your learning. Your religion, too, in these parts.

Mompesson What do you mean?

Saville You're too young to remember the war. Many of those wounds are still open; some are festering.

Mompesson I remember what it was like before the King came back. And the war, too, when I was a boy.

Saville But you didn't see the dying, and you don't know the bitterness. You've heard me speak of Thomas Stanley?

Mompesson Yes.

Saville He was rector here under Cromwell. Calls himself a Nonconformist, which means he knows better how to worship God than God does. He's still here.

Mompesson I didn't know that.

Saville There are about three hundred and fifty people in this village. Perhaps two hundred of them are still his friends; which means that they're your enemies.

Mompesson The rector of God has no enemies, only sheep to be fed.

Saville Now rinse that starch from your face, my boy, I know my duty and you know yours. But you must come two steps down from heaven if you want to speak to these people. The lead miners in these parts were strong Parliament men, some of them the most fanatic. You'll have to make some concessions.

Mompesson Concessions? Do you know what made me a churchman?

Saville Your father's good example, and your own intelligence.

Mompesson No. My intelligence could have made me a civil servant or a diplomat. I could have spent my life making the King laugh and getting drunk. I chose Christ because of a vision.

Saville God preserve me from Visions. What do you mean?

Mompesson In Eyam I shall lay the first foundation of God's house. The drawing is clear in my mind, and I won't begin by making concessions to the material.

Saville laughs

Why are you laughing at me?

Saville To bring you back to earth, my boy. You won't see anything from a pedestal looking down.

Mompesson I don't intend to be remote. But you know I have had little experience of people of this kind.

Saville My dear William . . .

Mompesson Yes, I know, it is a failing in me, I am conscious of it. My life has been scholarly, but I shall learn. I think it important that I should establish my position from the start.

Saville So do I, too, and I don't doubt you will soon become dearly loved here. They are God-fearing people in Eyam. There is nothing beyond their reach, if you are their signpost.

Mompesson To the best of my ability, I shall be that and more.

Catherine Mompesson enters, with her two small Children, aged four and five

Saville Here's your wife, they must be finished at the coach. Is it all unloaded?

Catherine Yes, it's done. Isn't this a beautiful place? Shut away in the hills, so you'd never know it was there.

Saville The most beautiful village in Derbyshire, so the locals say. For myself, I'd call it pretty bleak. But not aloud.

Mompesson It's strange the way the road seems to wind up through the cliff face. It makes it even more isolated. Is there no other way?

Saville There's a road across the high moor to Sheffield, if you have a good thick cloak and a taste for solitude. Shall we go in?

A thin, tinkling bell is heard off

Mompesson What's that noise?

They listen for a second as the bell gets closer

The Bedlam enters. He is a mental defective, dressed in rags, carrying a tin box for pennies, which he rattles, and wearing a small silver bell about his neck. He is about twenty, tall and thin, with a large bony head, and a vacant stare. He stoops and limps, dragging one foot on a twisted ankle. He stops when he sees the three strangers

There is a pause. The Bedlam rattles the tin box very loudly, and then hobbles over to them, and stands holding out the box and looking at them

Saville Hallo, boy. How much have you got in your box today?

Bedlam Give me a penny.

Saville There.

Bedlam I collect pennies. I like the old black ones best. I polish them up till all the heads are shiny.

Saville What do you buy with them?

Bedlam I throw them in the stream and watch them turning over till they reach the waterfall. The little ones always win. Have you got any little ones?

Mompesson I think so . . .

Bedlam You have to make them shiny, or you can't see them in the water.

Mompesson Who is he?

Saville No-one knows where he came from. He sleeps in a hut outside the village.

Catherine Poor boy. How does he live?

Saville By begging. He's very friendly, and always cheerful, in spite of his bent bones and empty mind. Aren't you, boy?

Bedlam I can tell fortunes.

Saville They stand him on a platform every year at the Harvest Wake, and he tells people by their clothes and the shape of their faces. He forecasts the weather too, don't you, boy?

Bedlam This winter will be cold, but in spring it will get hot again.

Saville That's a fair bet.

Catherine It's cruel to make him a plaything. Come here, boy.

Bedlam Hallo, lady.

Catherine You'll need a new coat before the winter, or you'll be cold.

Bedlam I don't feel the cold.

Catherine You haven't much choice, I suppose. You come to the rectory tomorrow and we'll find you a new coat.

Saville Tell our fortunes for us, boy.

Catherine Don't make fun of him.

Saville No, he likes it. Go on, boy, begin with me.

Bedlam You will always be a fat man.

Saville Me! I'm not fat!

Bedlam Until December.

Saville And what happens then?

Bedlam They polish your bones and hang them up in the cupboard. And all your warm clothes . . .

Saville What about them?

Bedlam Will be left in a pile on the floor.

Saville You see? He enjoys it.

Bedlam You're all dressed in black.

Mompesson It's the colour of my calling.

Bedlam Black is a sad colour, and you must always wear it in the churchyard.

Catherine What about me? Tell me a nice fortune, and I'll give you another penny.

Bedlam Roses must be pruned at the end of the summer. Merrill told me that.

Catherine Who's Merrill?

Saville An old man who lives on the edge of the village. The boy helps him in his garden.

Catherine Haven't you got anything for me except garden stories?

Bedlam No, lady. Nothing at all.

Saville Run along now, boy, you must go back to your hut, or you'll be out in the dark. We'd better go in, too, if the baggage is ready. Come on, children.

Bedlam I'll catch a mole to do the digging.

Saville Of course you will.

Saville exits with the two Children

Bedlam follows, and turns at the exit

Bedlam Good-bye, Blackman. Good-bye, rose.

Bedlam exits

Catherine Poor boy. We must try to help him.

Mompesson is away from her in thought

What's wrong?

Mompesson Nothing.

Catherine Tell me.

Mompesson This place.

Catherine I'm sure we shall be happy here.

Mompesson A simple man, whose faith is by the book, could give these people all they need. Do you think I can? What language shall I speak to pitmen and carters and barrel-makers, to farmers who dig themselves insensible all day, and snore their nights through without one thought or dream of God? They don't need signposts from me, or anyone. They want a comforter, a spiritual shoe-horn to ease them through their lives. I shall bless their children, marry them, and bury them. They'll come to me for herbs for their sick wives, water on their babies' foreheads, and prayers and crosses for their dying grandfathers. My most important office will be president of the churchyard, the man who keeps the toll gate to heaven.

Catherine You must silence those thoughts. The voice of ambition isn't wanted here, only the voice of love. You know it in your heart.

Mompesson The knowledge is one thing. The action another. I hope I know my failings. I didn't think they would be put to the test so soon.

Mompesson looks at her for a second, and they leave together

The Lights come up a few points, and the whole stage is used for the Harvest Wake scene. Music begins to play

Simultaneously, three people enter. Up C, Marshall Howe, an enormous man, well over six feet, built like Samson. Andrew Merrill enters L and Old Unwin R; two querulous and lively old men, both about eighty. The two old men stop when they see each other

Unwin Good day, Andrew Merrill.

Merril Good day, Unwin.

They both turn briskly and begin to leave the way they have come. Howe comes downstage to form the apex of a triangle

Howe For God's sake, is that all?

The two old men stop and turn

Nothing else for the feast day?

They both walk over to him

Unwin You're a blasphemer, Marshall Howe, good afternoon.

Merril Take not the Lord's name in vain, good afternoon.

Howe My penance is to make you friends.

Unwin I spoke to him last wake day.

Merril So did I.

Unwin I said "Good day, Merrill".

Merril I said "Good day, Unwin".

Unwin Enough idle chat for one year.

Merril Quite enough!

At this point the stage begins to fill with people, the villagers, who will act as the Chorus. Their main purpose in the play is to diminish, thus creating a visual image of the whole play

The Chorus consists of five families, which we are conscious of as family units, and which should be emphasised as such by the Director, and various other villagers necessary at various points in the action. These numbers should be added to, or even subtracted from, according to the size of the stage available. The point is simply that the stage for this first scene should be full of a large and animated crowd of people

The families come on simultaneously from different parts of the stage, bringing various props with them, to suggest the fair, at the Director's discretion, remembering only that an autumn fair in a country village is a mixture of a celebratory and a commercial occasion. They are all on stage, and the stage is fully dressed when the following section ends

The villagers are as follows: the Sydalls: Mrs Sydall and Richard, parents, middle aged; John, aged sixteen; Sarah, aged seventeen; Ellen, aged eighteen, and Emmot, aged twenty

The Hancocks: Mrs Hancock and John, parents, middle aged; William, a brother, aged thirty-eight; Alice, aged twenty-five, and Elizabeth, aged twenty

The Friths: Frances, mother, aged forty-five; George, father, aged fifty; Elizabeth, sister, aged forty-four; Mary, aged twenty-five; Francis, aged twenty-three; Ann, aged twenty, and Thomas, aged nineteen

The Torres: Humphrey, grandfather, aged seventy-five; Edytha, grandmother, aged sixty-five; William, father, aged forty-four; Alice, mother, aged forty-two; John, aged twenty-seven; Scythe, aged twenty-one; Thomas, aged eighteen, and Frances, aged seventeen

The Thornleys: Isaac, grandfather, aged eighty; Edward, father, aged fifty-five; Elizabeth, mother, aged fifty-six; William, aged thirty-five; Francis, aged twenty-eight, and Mary, aged twenty-five

John and Deborah Wilson, aged thirty-five and forty; Elizabeth Swanne, aged twenty; Lydia Chapman, aged forty-two; Rowland and George Mower, aged forty-five and thirty; George Vicars, a tailor, aged about thirty; Mrs Cooper, middle aged, and Edward and Jonathan Cooper, thirtyish and mid-twenties

The dialogue between the three men continues uninterrupted as the villagers begin to enter

Howe Not for today. This is Harvest Sunday, fit time for sermons, and the text is age, so listen. Age is the time when a man's life becomes a circle, when grandfather begins to toddle again, and old men have so much snow on their heads their brains turn to water. True?

Unwin True.

Merril True.

Howe A time when coffins stand open, and spades are called for, and old men need prayers. True?

Merril True.

Howe A time for totting accounts, balancing books, and settling old scores. True?

Unwin True.

Merril True.

Howe How did it all start?

Unwin How old are you this year, Merrill?

Merril Eighty.

Unwin Liar! Seventy-nine!

Merril I remember the day the old Queen died.

Unwin I remember the Armada.

Merril I fought the Armada!

Howe Boys were men in those days.

Merril And I was first with Joan Dunnett.

Unwin But it was me she preferred.

Merril I proposed on top of a haystack.

Unwin I was listening at the bottom. She said no.

Howe Which one did she choose?

Merril Neither.

Unwin She married a shoemaker from Sheffield.

Merril Twenty-one children.

Unwin Sixty-eight grandchildren.

Merril Died of a broken heart.

Unwin And senile decay.

Merril Forty years old.

Unwin Sixteen hundred and twenty-five!

Merril Before the war.

Unwin Years ago . . .

Howe And you're both still here, like the old leavings of last year's dinner. There's just time for a truce, before you get cleared away.

Rowland Torre enters upstage, as the three men join the crowd. He is a young man of twenty, a sturdy and tough-looking hill farmer from the neighbouring village

At the end of the above dialogue, the Sydall family have isolated themselves from the main crowd, and interest switches to them as Sarah is the first to see Rowland

Sarah Sydall Rowland!

Ellen Sydall Emmot, it's Rowland!

Rowland joins them

Richard Sydall Hallo, Rowland, how are you?

Rowland Hallo, Mr Sydall, fine thanks.

Richard Sydall Good harvest?

Rowland All in. Hallo, Emmot.

Emmot Hallo, Rowland.

Mrs Sydall Were you at church this morning, Rowland?

Rowland Yes, Mrs Sydall.

Mrs Sydall Did you pray hard for God's blessing on the two of you?

Marriage isn't a thing to be taken lightly.

Rowland Very hard, Mrs Sydall.

Mrs Sydall Good lad.

The Bedlam enters and stands looking at the people

Ellen Sydall Everyone's here, Rowland, celebrating the harvest.

Sarah Sydall No, they've all come to see the engagement.

John Sydall There's the Hancocks come down from Riley.

Ellen Sydall And all your cousins Torre.

Rowland I knew they were coming.

Sarah Sydall Scythe and Thomas have brought their pipes for the dancing.

Mrs Sydall They shouldn't be dancing on a Sunday!

Richard Sydall Why not? It's a day of rest, not a day of misery. There's always dancing when there's an engagement on wakes day.

Mrs Sydall I still don't hold with it. It's disrespectful on the Lord's day.

Richard Sydall No more than all your women's gossip. I heard you this morning after church. "The rector's wife, Mrs Frith, she's that thin and ill looking . . ."

Mrs Sydall Well, so she is, it's the truth.

Richard Sydall Far more malicious than any dancing, so you can turn a blind eye for once. Come on, Rowland, let's see what you can do. Man and wife who can't dance when the time calls won't live long.

Rowland Do you mind, Emmot?

Emmot I don't mind.

The two Torres begin to play, Emmot and Rowland begin to dance together, and are soon followed by other younger couples

Mrs Sydall You'll see my daughter dead and in Hell with all your wild games of a Sunday.

Richard Sydall You've seen plenty of games of your own in your day, old Sarah.

Mrs Sydall Well!

By this time most of the younger ones have joined in the dancing, while the older ones stand in a half-circle, shouting encouragement and clapping to the music, or joining in themselves. The Bedlam watches them. He is joined by Marshall Howe

Colonel Bradshaw enters, with Mrs Bradshaw, looking very much lord of the manor

Howe Hallo, boy. Have you come to join in the dancing?

Bedlam All the people.

Howe They're all here today: Squire Bradshaw, wearing a festive smile, and wondering how much it's costing him, the hardworking family Frith, still in their fieldboots, and all the starched-up Thornleys, enjoying a thin religious pleasure, suitable for Sunday. Even George Vicars the tailor, leaving his scissors and moneybags for one afternoon. Let them dance, eh boy? It'll be winter soon.

Bedlam I can't dance with my legs.

Howe You're an old ragbag, aren't you, boy, an old ragbag full of junk and rubbish.

Bedlam I can dance with my head, though.

Howe What, is there dancing in there? All I can see in your eyes, boy, is sky, and blue clouds.

Bedlam My dancing goes on forever, and never gets tired.

Howe One of the big advantages of being a madman.

Thomas Stanley enters. He is a rather down-at-heel-looking Puritan preacher in his fifties, an imposing man with a mane of white hair, seeming to bring on the stage with him, in his very appearance, a memory of the Puritan revolution at its most positive and idealistic stage. He is a big rugged man, more at home in the market place than in the study, a man of intensity and imagination, with none of the narrow-gutted and repressive qualities of nineteenth-century Puritanism. He is brother to John Milton and Gerrard Winstanley, and shares their vision, even if at this point in the play bitterness seems to have defeated him

Stanley stands for a moment watching the dancing, then turns away. Edward Thornley detaches himself from his family and crosses over to him

Edward Thornley Good afternoon, Mr Stanley.

Stanley This is a sad sight, Edward Thornley.

Edward Thornley Ay, a sad sight for the Lord's day. But my people know their duty. There was none of this when you were rector here.

Stanley It will have to be paid for.

Edward Thornley Times have changed in five years. But some of us still keep faith. Why don't you speak to them. They will still listen to you.

Stanley It is no longer my place to speak.

Edward Thornley More's the pity. Have you met the new King's man?

Stanley No.

Edward Thornley You've missed nothing. A youngster, full of arrogance and spleen, who spits in the dust as we pass.

Stanley I've no wish to meet him. Our ways are opposite.

Edward Thornley Some of us fought for the Parliament once. We can fight for God now, if you speak out for us.

Stanley I can do nothing now.

Edward Thornley Don't leave us, Minister. We need you.

Stanley I can pray for you. We can meet in your houses and talk together.

Other than that we can only wait. God's hand is still on the wheel.

Those who are up now will be brought down, and the downtrodden will stand. We must be patient, and love God.

Stanley and Edward Thornley go upstage together to the Thornley group. Various people acknowledge Stanley as he goes. He replies, but retiringly. He has no wish to be the centre of interest. The dancing continues for a few seconds

Mompesson enters downstage and absorbs the scene

Edward Thornley nudges Stanley, and Stanley turns and sees Mompesson. Mompesson becomes conscious of his gaze, and the two men look at each other. The musicians stop playing when they see what is happening, the dancing gradually ceases, and everyone becomes conscious of the imminent meeting of the two men. Mompesson begins to make a move towards Stanley, and immediately Stanley moves diagonally away from him through the crowd. As he gets clear of the crowd Mompesson calls to him

Mompesson Mr Stanley.

Slowly Stanley turns to face him. The villagers gaze avidly

Stanley Sir?

Mompesson William Mompesson . . .

Mompesson moves over to Stanley, with his arm extended to shake hands. Stanley ignores it and looks at him

Stanley Good afternoon.

Mompesson is rather taken aback, but he has decided to be friendly in a formal manner

Mompesson I have been looking forward—ever since I arrived—to meeting you. But I have been unable to find out where you are living now.

Stanley Not surprising, sir. I live by begging, on the charitable crumbs of those tables that still have a place set for me. I have no house, no land, no Church, but the oak tree at the end of the street. You can always find me there.

Mompesson I have been meaning to ask you to dine with me at the rectory.

Stanley You can spare the trouble.

Mompesson No trouble, I assure you . . .

Stanley I left that house five years ago on the arms of the King's soldiers.

If I ever return to it, it won't be as a guest.

Mompesson Times have changed, Mr Stanley, and the law is the law. I suppose we must disagree, but we need not be enemies.

Stanley You are a scholar, sir?

Mompesson Like a good workman, I have studied my trade.

Stanley Then you will have learned that there is right and wrong, and that oil and vinegar in the same jar won't mix without a beating. You build your palace, and I will build mine, and let God decide which of us has constructed a tomb. My thanks for your kindness, sir. Good afternoon.

Stanley turns and leaves

Mompesson stands for a moment looking at the crowd. They watch him in silence

Mompesson seems about to say something, but suddenly turns and goes out

Chatter breaks out among the crowd, but it is restrained by what they have just seen. The musicians begin to play again, but no-one dances. Edward Thornley and George Frith join Marshall Howe downstage

Howe There's a black cloud gone over the sun. There'll be no more dancing today.

Edward Thornley He didn't say much for himself, did he.

George Frith The new rector?

Edward Thornley Won't lower himself to speak to us.

George Frith He's no great love for us, if the truth's known.

Howe Did you hear a rumble like an earthquake?

George Frith No.

Howe It was the dead men of a war twenty years old turning in their graves. They get restless in their sheets at that kind of talk, and their fingerbones feel for weapons. Some of the living too, eh Edward?

Edward Thornley I was at Marston Moor, and proud to have been there.

Howe But the Good Old Cause is dead, and its soldiers gone rotten. And those that are left are poor shells, scooped out and brittle. Like our once rector Stanley.

Edward Thornley What do you mean by that? The Minister is——

George Frith (*cutting in*) Those times are best forgotten.

Howe Try telling your churchmen that.

Richard Sydall Ay, those fellows will still be fighting, even on my daughter's engagement day.

Edward Thornley Some things, Richard Sydall, are worth fighting for.

Richard Sydall Ay, I daresay, Edward Thornley, I daresay. Nevertheless, all men are welcome at my house to drink my daughter's health, however they choose to say their prayers.

George Frith Say amen to that, Edward.

Edward Thornley Amen. With all my heart.

Richard Sydall If we can find her, that is! They've both wandered off some road so that the Lord knows where they've got to!

The Carter enters. He is carrying a large black wooden box. He sees the three men and goes to them

Carter Is this the village of Eyam?

Howe You must have driven a long way if you don't know that.

Carter I have. I need a rest and a drink.

Edward Thornley Where are you from?

Carter London.

George Frith London!

Howe Strangers are rare enough here. If you're from London you're almost unique.

Edward Thornley What's the news in the south?

Carter Not good.

George Frith More troubles?

Carter Not the sort of news to be talking about.

Howe Then don't talk about it. What have you got in the box?

Carter Merchandise. Can you show me to the house of a Mr Vicars?

Edward Thornley George Vicars the tailor?

Carter That'll be the one.

George Frith He shares a cottage with the Coopers. But you needn't carry it, he's here. George!

Howe George Vicars! Here's a present for you, from London!

George Vicars comes over to them from the main crowd. He is a small and rather fussy little man of about thirty

Vicars Ah, my box, my box, my box. Good. Is it all there?

Carter How should I know, I haven't looked.

Vicars From the big drapers in Thames Street?

Carter That's it.

Howe What is it, George, solid gold?

Carter Heavy enough. My horses are half dead.

Vicars All in good time you shall know. You shall know all in good time.

Carter I need a good meal.

Howe He'll give you some bread and cheese if you're lucky.

Vicars Pick it up and bring it over to the cross.

George Frith Are you going back tonight?

Carter Not to London, I'm not.

Edward Thornley You're not going back?

Carter Not this year.

Vicars leads the Carter, carrying the box, over to the cross. Vicars stands on the pedestal of the cross, and the people gather round to see what is happening

Vicars Ladies and gentlemen of Eyam! I have a very important announcement to make.

Cheers and jeers from the assembling crowd, "What is it, George", etc., etc.

A piece of very good news for the people of this village. You see here a large black box . . .

Howe His grandmother's coffin, he's putting her up for auction.

More cheers

Vicars Nothing of the kind. There's no rubbish in this box, I'll tell you that!

Richard Sydall Come on, George, don't keep us in suspense!

Vicars There's nothing but the latest fashions in there! There's London clothes, and at Eyam prices! First comers get best choice!

John Wilson Let's see them then, George, why not start now?

Vicars Tomorrow will be soon enough. Nine o'clock at Mrs Cooper's.

Howe He needs time to work out his percentages and profits, don't you, George?

George Mower Why are they so cheap, George? Did you get them from the rubbish dump?

Francis Frith You cut them from the corpses on the gallows, didn't you, George.

Vicars You'll find out tomorrow. Laugh if you like, Francis Frith. You come early tomorrow, and you'll get a surprise.

Cheers from the crowd

Let's go down to Mrs Cooper's, and we can settle the account.

Carter Ay, and about time.

Vicars climbs down from the cross, and goes off with the Carter

General chatter resumes

Encouraged by Mrs Sydall and other members of the family, everyone is beginning to drift offstage in the direction of the Sydalls' cottage

As the last villagers begin to go, Richard Sydall crosses to Emmot and Rowland who, since the end of the dancing, have not been part of the general celebration, keeping themselves to themselves in obscure corners of the set, or offstage

Richard Sydall Oh, there you are! Come on, Emmot! Everyone will be waiting.

Emmot In a minute, Dad.

Richard Sydall Ah yes, my lass, all right then. Don't be too long though.

Richard Sydall smiles at them and goes, leaving Rowland and Emmot alone on stage

The Lights fade a point or two

Emmot What a noise.

Rowland So many handshakes.

Emmot And kisses.

Rowland Yes . . . How are you?

Emmot All right.

Rowland Really.

Emmot Frightened.

Rowland What?

Emmot A bit.

Rowland Why? The churchyard?

Emmot No, I like it here. It's the only quiet place today.

Rowland Frightened of what, then?

Emmot I don't know. Everything's so brittle.

Rowland Brittle? What's brittle?

Emmot Everything. Me. You.

Rowland Listen, if there's one thing that's not brittle, it's me, I'll tell you that! That's muscle, that is. Solid! All yours that is, come not too many days!

Emmot Too many days, though. So much that can happen.

Rowland Emmot, you're too broody. We'll have none of that when you're my wife, you know, not with the farm to run!

Emmot It's such a strange thing to do, to give yourself to someone else. You can't help being a little bit frightened. Everything's divided by two, whatever you want or think or say becomes double-edged. I haven't got used to it yet.

Rowland You will get used to it. You'll have to, won't you.

Emmot You've got to be so much stronger and cleverer and more careful. It seems unfair.

Rowland Listen, you love me, don't you?

Emmot Aye. I do.

Rowland And I love you, too. So what else do you want?

Emmot I suppose you're right, then, aren't you. To be this minute alive and happy is enough for any one person. Isn't it?

Rowland Course it is. Now come on, we must get back. There's a lot of fellers waiting to get drunk on our behalf tonight.

Emmot Aye, I can tell you the names of some of them, too!

Emmot and Rowland go off together, towards the sound of the celebrations, now quite audible offstage

It is now quite dark as Thomas Stanley enters, alone, in the empty village street

He stops and looks in the direction of the laughing and singing, which continues faintly throughout his scene

Stanley Dear God, how can your sins be justified? This was Paradise, and you gave us a snake. This was Christ, promising life, but we are all dead men, and still waiting. We built you a palace, a clean temple, with the moneytables overturned; but you sent us a whirlwind, and blew it down; and now the marble is fallen, the tombs of the giants lie open to the sky, and our bodies are lifted up for public show. What does a man do, who is left the tenant of a ruin, who is himself a house

where the foundations have crumbled, and weeds grow up through the floor? He seizes prayer, and holds to it fast, till his fingers break. Many nights, God, I have met you here, and you have always spoken to me. Now the philistines are back, and the idol-mongers, with their drunkard King and his train of whores. But you have blinded me, taken my tongue, left me for dead, worse . . . I can do nothing, a beggar, going hungry, no man is my friend, and none seem worthy of the love I once gave them for you. Christ in Heaven, your latest humiliation was too much, to break bread with a young boy in the house that was once yours and is now the shelter of your enemies . . .! He has left this place. There is no word now for me. I shall pray still for those few that love him; but my prayers are the prayers of a beggar, my heart is cold, and I know there is no love there. I shall live shadowed, in alleys and corners. Perhaps, if his voice comes again, I shall not be too deaf to hear.

Slowly, Stanley walks off, enclosed in his agony

The Lights lift to mid-morning brightness, and the church bell tolls nine

Francis Frith enters

Francis Frith I took the miser at his word. I was there, first stroke of the bell. But there'll be no sale today.

Richard, Emmot, John, Sarah, Ellen and Mrs Sydall enter in a group

Mrs Sydall (*entering*) If it's George Vicars, it'll all be rubbish, you know that . . .

Richard Sydall Hello, Francis, you've beaten us to it. Haven't you got anything?

Francis Frith I didn't see anything.

Mrs Sydall I wouldn't be surprised if it's all some daft joke, and I've got work to do.

Emmot What's it like, Francis?

Sarah Sydall Are the dresses nice?

John Sydall He says he didn't see.

Ellen Sydall Didn't you like any of it?

Francis Frith The door's bolted. He's ill.

Isaac, Edward, Elizabeth, William, Francis and Mary Thornley enter in a group

Mrs Sydall Ill, is he? Some story that is. He was all right last night.

Isaac Thornley Where's this damn sale, then? Getting me out of bed for a load of rubbish . . .

Richard Sydall It doesn't look like there'll be any sale this morning, Isaac.

Isaac Thornley What do you mean, no sale? I'm back to me bed then . . .

Elizabeth Thornley Wait a minute, Grandad. Why won't there be any sale? You Sydalls got there first, I suppose!

Mrs Sydall Francis was first, if you must know. George is ill, apparently.

Elizabeth Thornley Ill, is he? First I've heard of it!

Mrs Sydall Well, it is only nine o'clock, Mrs Thornley, and you don't hear everything in this village quite as it happens.

Humphrey, Edytha, William, Alice, John, Scythe, Thomas and Frances Torre enter in a group

Richard Sydall All right, then, you're as bad as a couple of hens with your featherpecking.

William Torre What's going on? Where's the sale?

Edward Thornley There's no sale. George is ill.

Humphrey Torre He can't be ill. He's a young man.

Ellen Sydall Well, Francis says he is.

Edward Thornley Just as well, if you ask me. We don't want any fancy clothes from London here.

John Torre What's wrong with him, Francis?

Ellen Sydall Francis has been there.

Francis Frith I don't know. I banged on the door, but Mrs Cooper told me to go away because he'd been ill all night.

Mrs Sydall Isn't it terrible, Mrs Thornley, not knowing?

Elizabeth Thornley Very annoying. We must go and have a word with Mrs Cooper.

Unwin and Merrill enter

Unwin All right, all right, you can stop all your questions, *I* can tell you the whole story . . .

Merril Just as *I* heard it, direct from the widow Cooper's own mouth . . .

Unwin Shortly after she told me. Last night, you see, while we were all enjoying ourselves, George opened up his black box from London . . .

Merril And there they were! Golds and silvers, silks and taffetas, all shining in the candlelight!

Unwin But when he feels them a bit, he finds they're a bit damp from the journey, so what does he do?

Merril He hangs them up on a rail in front of the fire to dry . . .

Unwin And within ten minutes . . .

Merril Nearer five if you ask me . . .

Unwin I didn't, so shut up.

Merril Nearer five . . .

Unwin He complained of a headache,

Merril And a queasy feeling . . .

Unwin So the widow Cooper packed him straight to bed,

Merril Where he was sick all night, all over her best sheets.

Unwin Twisting and screaming like a slit pig.

Merril And he's no better this morning!

Unwin Possibly worse!

Chatter and discussion break out at a high pitch

Mompesson enters

Mompesson What's the matter?

The chatter ceases, but no-one answers. There is still a strong antipathy

Is anything wrong?

Edward Thornley George Vicars is ill.

Mompesson Oh. What's wrong with him?

Edward Thornley If we knew that, we'd be helping him, not talking about it.

Mompesson You'd better send for the doctor.

Edward Thornley There's no doctor. You're the doctor here.

Mompesson Me? But I know nothing about it . . .

Edward Thornley You're supposed to be the rector, aren't you?

Mompesson I know my duty, Mr Thornley.

Edward Thornley Ah. Pity you don't know your parishioners as well!

Mompesson I know very well, Mr Thornley, what you and some others here think of me. Since you seem determined to hate me, there is nothing I can do but pray for you.

Edward Thornley And George Vicars can go hang, and us with him!

Mompesson I am a man of God, sir, not a doctor. (*He turns to go*)

Jonathan Cooper enters up C, and calls to Mompesson

Jonathan Cooper You must come to my mother's cottage, Rector . . .

Mompesson I can do nothing but pray for him, Mr Cooper, I haven't the skill . . .

Jonathan Cooper That's it, sir. He keeps asking for you. My mother would have come herself, but he keeps being sick, and saying wild things, and she can't leave him.

Richard Sydall What's wrong with him, Jon?

Jonathan Cooper A fever and vomiting, and his tongue like a dry black leather, and a red rash like roses on his skin. Please come, Rector, my mother says he may be dying.

A burst of excited and concerned chatter from the crowd. Mompesson seems unsure of himself, uncertain what to do or what is expected of him

Mompesson Yes—yes.

Mompesson seems to decide suddenly, and moves quickly upstage, Cooper following. The others prepare to follow in a crowd. Up to this point Mompesson has always been shy and retiring with the villagers, but now he turns, and calls to them in a voice of firmness and strength

No. Stop!

The crowd silences. Mompesson's voice assumes its normal diffidence

One man is ill. If he is in pain, he has no wish to become a public spectacle. I shall speak to him and to God, and if it is his will, he will soon be recovered. We all have work to do. Go and do yours.

Mompesson looks at them for a moment and then exits up C with Jonathan Cooper. All the villagers exit talking quietly, with the exception of Richard and Mrs Sydall, and Edward and Elizabeth Thornley

Edward Thornley There's your new rector, Sydall. He has to be driven to visit a sick man.

Elizabeth Thornley Mr Stanley never had to be sent for.

Richard Sydall Don't be unjust, Edward. He doesn't know us yet, or our ways.

Edward Thornley I'll give him six weeks. And I tell you, Richard, at the end of that time we'll be glad to drive him out with staves.

Richard Sydall Well. You may be right. But a lot can happen in six weeks.

Edward Thornley I hope so, for his sake.

Richard Sydall And ours.

Richard and Mrs Sydall and Edward and Elizabeth Thornley exit together L

The Lights centre on the cottage area up R, which opens to reveal the interior of Mrs Cooper's cottage. George Vicars is in bed, Mrs Cooper beside him. Edward Cooper sits in a chair facing downstage, with his head in his hands. The black box is seen, standing open, and a rail, on which some of the clothes are hanging

Jonathan Cooper and Mompesson enter from a door at the back

Mrs Cooper Thank the Lord you've come, Rector, I don't know what to do any more.

Mompesson How is he?

Mrs Cooper Quiet all of a sudden. But all night he's been screaming and crying and sick. I've tried everything, Rector, but I've never seen anything like this before.

Mompesson I know nothing about sick people I'm afraid, Mrs Cooper . . .

Mrs Cooper Look at his neck.

Mompesson Where?

Mrs Cooper That patch was red early this morning. It went black and hard suddenly. There's one twice the size on his chest, and more under his arms and between his toes. He's been bringing up blood and sick all night.

Vicars Is that you, Rector? I can't see.

Mompesson I'm here, and with me is God to comfort you.

Vicars I can't see.

Mrs Cooper You'll get no sense out of him, Rector. He's been talking all

Hungry for More?

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