

SCENE 1

[Breydon, North Bank. Rain. Marsh stretches away on all sides. Left, the interior of The Plover, LEAF's houseboat. LEAF is sitting at the tiny table. He has a monocular round his neck.]

CHOIR

*A new tide makes
The wind blows cold
On Breydon Water*

*The hard-fowl cry
The moon turns old
All Breydon Waits*

[POPPY leads CROWTHER along the bank. He's obviously blind.]

*And from the East
A darkening sky
Brings down, like falling snow,
Watch it fall
Soft snow, as if to lie
On Breydon Water
On Breydon Water*

CROWTHER

How's the flood comin on?

POPPY

The lumps is still showin'. Another hour to high water, more or less.

CROWTHER

We should be there by my reckoning.

POPPY

An old houseboat with a crooked stovepipe?

CROWTHER

That's her.

POPPY

She's sittin' on the mud. *[She turns him.]* Over that way.

CROWTHER

Sittin' fair?

POPPY

A bit on the huh, I'd say.

CROWTHER Don't you worry. *The Plover's* been a bit on the huh since afore you were born.

Song continues:

CHOIR *By Lockgate Mill
The eel-grass grows
By Breydon Water*

*A midnight chill
A cold wind blows
And Breydon waits*

POPPY He really lived out here?

CROWTHER He did. Someone has to watch, he used to say. Someone allus' has to watch.

POPPY What's he mean by that?

CROWTHER Now that's a question.

LEAF *The winter geese
Are waiting still
While here, on Lockgate Drain
Falls the rain
Soft rain, falling still*

CHOIR *On Breydon Water
On Breydon Water*

POPPY What was he like?

CROWTHER Oi' Leaf? Tall. Like a harnser.

[LEAF extricates himself from the houseboat]

CROWTHER You could see him comin' a mile away. How he fold hisself into *The Plover* we never did work out. Be like tryin' to get the mast off a wherry in there.

[LEAF moves past them. He's invisible to POPPY.]

He's long gone now.

POPPY No point saying hello then.

CROWTHER Just because he's gone that don't mean he's gone.

POPPY Can I look inside?

[She moves inside. LEAF stands next to CROWTHER, both looking out over the water in a companionable silence.]

CROWTHER You were the only one I told. The day I lost the map out my head.

I'd started out from the Bowlin' Green along the north wall followin' the ebb. I've know this place since I was a boy. Could walk it in the dark and never get my feet wet. But not that day. I could see water and mud and the path in front of me. But I han't the least idea where to go.

Marsh fever, they said. You remember?

LEAF I remember.

CROWTHER But that weren't a fever. I stood lookin' at the marker posts in the channel. Posts I'd helped set with my own hands. I knew they meant somethin'. But I din't know what it was. Can you imagine that? I din't know. I never been so scared in all my life.

BEAT

Tha's happenin' again, Leaf, ol' friend.
Tha's happenin' again.

CHOIR *In Five Stake Drain
The tide returns
On Breydon Water*

POPPY *[returning]* There's an old jacket in there. Is it his, do you think?

CROWTHER I dare say.

POPPY It's like he jus' popped out.

CROWTHER There's some weather comin' in. We should get back.

POPPY You want to go inside? I'll take you.

BREYDON CROWTHER (Scrivener)

CROWTHER We should go I say.

*[CROWTHER sets off. POPPY hesitates for a moment
and then joins him. LEAF watches them go.]*

CHOIR *In Five Stake Drain
The tide returns
On Breydon Water*

*The winter dawn
Still looks the same
All Breydon waits*

*Though curlews call
Yet soon a day
Will bring one final tide
Night will fall*

LEAF *Will fall, for ever fall*

CHOIR *On Breydon Water
On Breydon Water
On Breydon Water*

SCENE 2

*[POPPY arrives at the door. CROWTHER is surrounded by
birds in glass cases. Largest and most prominent is a
Spoonbill.]*

POPPY Hello!
Mr Crowther – that's Poppy!

CROWTHER Well come you in, then.

POPPY I can't. You left the bolt on.

[He struggles to his feet]

Mr Crowther –

BREYDON CROWTHER (Scrivener)

CROWTHER Hold you hard, girl. I'm comin' as fast as I can.

[He lets her in.]

You should ha' told me if you were comin' so early.

POPPY I did tell you. You forgot, that's all. You always do. You'll forget what day it is next.

CROWTHER That's Tuesday. And tomorrow's Wednesday. An then it's the 12th and that's a Thursday and you won't be here because you've got to visit your aunt or so you say –

POPPY An' so I have –

CROWTHER Then more's the better because praps then I shall get some peace and quiet.

What time is it?

POPPY That's near on eight.

Sir Morton's on his way. I saw him down at Durrants. He said he want a word.

CROWTHER Sir Morton? He'll need a henchman, I dare say. You'd better look out my gun.

POPPY I shall do no such thing. You're enough trouble as it is without a loaded gun in your hands.

CROWTHER Just because I can't see that don't mean I can't shoot.

POPPY Lord save us.

CROWTHER Mock all you like girl. I've brought down birds at night with nothin' more to shoot at than the sound of wingbeats over my head. I could do it still.

POPPY I reckon you could, n'all.

CROWTHER If you're goin' to start agreein' with me we shall fall out.
Life's confusin' enough as it is.

POPPY Don't worry. I shan't. [*Music / song*] That must be hard
though. That's all I'm sayin'.

CROWTHER Hard? Why should it be hard?

POPPY You know what I mean. If there's things you can't do
then missin' them is only natural.

CROWTHER What, is it pity now? Don't waste your breath. There's
plenty worse off than me.
Night might ha' come to my Breydon skies...

*[Sings] But I've walked in the dawn
An' seen the snipe rise*

POPPY I know you have.

CROWTHER What do you see? Me sat on my arse wishin' my life
away? Not me 'bor.

*I remember it all
That's burned in my brain
The frets and the blows
The mist and the rain
When the frost held her hard
And the ice in her drains
Was like iron*

*Oh don't pity me none
I am the fortunate one.*

CROWTHER Who else can say the best of their days are preserved
behind glass? Answer me that, eh?

You walk around blind
Aye, you girl, not I

SONG *You never look up*

To the life in the sky

*I know what they say
But they can't take away
What a man can remember*

*So don't pity me none
You say you're lucky
But I am the fortunate one.*

CHOIR *The fortunate one..*

CROWTHER *I am the fortunate one.*

CHOIR *The fortunate one...*

CROWTHER *I am the fortunate one.*

*Night might ha' come
To my Breydon skies
But I've walked in the dawn
And seen the snipe rise
An' the sun burn a path
In the west as it die
An' the salt tide
Give way to the fresh*

CHOIR *Don't pity me none...*

CROWTHER *I've lived my life wild*

CHOIR *Under Breydon skies...*

CROWTHER *I am the fortunate one*

CHOIR *Don't pity me none*

CROWTHER *I've lived my life wild*

CHOIR *Under Breydon skies...*

CROWTHER *I am the fortunate one*

CROWTHER What time is it?

POPPY Eight o'clock. I told you.

CROWTHER Eight o'clock. That's right. Eight o'clock.

SAVILE [*arriving. He's carrying a bird.*] Now then, Ben. How are we this morning?

CROWTHER Sir Morton. Good day to you, sir. Poppy said you'd be callin'.

SAVILE Poppy.

CROWTHER If you need another gun I can be ready in five minutes.

SAVILE I don't doubt it. Though Poppy might have something to say about that.

POPPY He'd do it too, if I let him.

CROWTHER She worry too much, that girl.

SAVILE You should be glad that she does. But I do need your help, Ben. I've got something for you. Shot last night. I wondered what you'd make of it.

CROWTHER You took her yourself?

SAVILE No. The Watcher disturbed someone in a punt down by the Lumps. It was too dark to see who. But whoever it was left this behind. I'd lay money it was that scoundrel Billy Liffens.

CROWTHER If he was usin' that ol punt gun o' his, you're wasting your time. I can't do nothin with dust 'n feathers.

SAVILE There isn't a mark on it.

CROWTHER Then he missed an' it died of fright. It make a prodigious noise that ol' gun. He pull that trigger an they duck all the way to Holland.

SAVILE Here – take it.

*[He hands CROWTHER the bird'
He begins to examine it.]*

CROWTHER Now I see her.

SAVILE Do you think you can do it?

CROWTHER She's good an' cold.

SAVILE Does that make it harder.

CROWTHER It might. For some.
On the Lumps, you say?

SAVILE Just so.

CROWTHER *The curve of her neck
The silken sheen of her feathers
Protecting in all weathers
The tiny heart beneath...*

CROWTHER Size of a whimbrel. But not with that bill

CROWTHER *The outstretched hand of her wing
That rode the breath of the cold wind
And touched the sharp salt spray
Out at sea*

CHOIR *Sailing free
Not knowing as you fly
Below the world was waiting
The place where you would die*

CROWTHER She's a godwick.

SAVILE Go on.

CROWTHER Bar tail or black tail.

CROWTHER *The arc of her flight
A curving trace of pure pleasure
An eye whose gaze could measure
The world spread out beneath*

CROWTHER Tha's a male. The female's a bigger bird.

CROWTHER *The open gape of her bill
That cried the sound of her heart's song
And rode the sharp salt wind
Out at sea*

CHOIR *Sailing free
Not knowing as it cried
Below the world was waiting
A heart anticipating*

CROWTHER *The place where it would die
The place where it would die.*

CHOIR *The curve...the curve...*

CROWTHER Rufous colouring on the breast. Pale underneath. White wing bars. Black tailed godwick. Male.

POPPY He's right!

CROWTHER Course I'm right. But you din't need me to tell you that.

SAVILE That's true. But Farndon's man put her down as a bar tail. I wagered a guinea you could do better.

CROWTHER Not much meat on him. You should give him to Tom Storr. Ol' Tom can make a Godwick taste like venison.

SAVILE Tom Storr?

CROWTHER He'll be here soon.

SAVILE I don't think so Ben.

CROWTHER You can't mistake him. The ends of his fingers is missin'.
Lost them choppin' the head off an old eel. He's set a plank
across the punt and sawed them right off. It were so cold
he din't know he'd done it. Can you imagine that?

POPPY No, no I can't.

CROWTHER He'll be here. What time is it?

POPPY You asked me that twice already.

CROWTHER Right off. Can you imagine that? Right off –

SAVILE How's he been, Poppy?

POPPY Well enough. Some days he's a bit confused, that's all.

SAVILE Keep an eye on him Poppy. He's going to need your help...

POPPY I will.
You're welcome to some breakfast. I shall have to make
some more if this Mr Storr is comin'.

SAVILE I don't think you need worry about Tom Storr. The old
boys knew him as Leaf. He's been dead for ten years.

SCENE 3

CHOIR *Cuckoo, cuckoo,
Cuckoo, cuckoo -*

*So sings the cuckoo as she flies
So sings the cuckoo as she flies*

So sings the cuckoo as she flies

[Crowther in his chair. Dainty appears at the outside door.]

CROWTHER Who's there?

Dainty hesitates at the threshold.

CROWTHER Who's there, I say?

DAINTY It's Dainty.

CROWTHER Say who?

DAINTY That's been a long time. I din't know as I'd find you. But that was easy. I asked on the quay. There 'aint a man in Yarmouth don't know Ben Crowther. That's what they say.

BEAT

It's Dainty.

CROWTHER Dainty?

DAINTY Don't you know me, father? I 'aint changed that much, have I?

BEAT

Father? Surely you 'aint forgotten -

CROWTHER I can't see -

DAINTY They told me. An my heart breaks for it. But my voice. You must know my voice? Don't you recognise it? Even a little -

CROWTHER Who do you say you are?

DAINTY It's Dainty, father. Your daughter, Dainty. Don't say I'm forgotten. Don't say it. I couldn't bear it -

CROWTHER *Do I know this child?*
DAINTY *Does the sun shine?*
CROWTHER *Do I know this voice?*
DAINTY *Does the wind blow?*
CROWTHER *Am I losing my mind*
 Is unravelling time
 Taking all that I know?

DAINTY All the way down here I kept thinkin' - what if he don't know me? What if it's been too long? What then? Father? Why don't you answer me?

CROWTHER Don't rush me. That's all of a muddle.

DAINTY *Will you welcome me home?*
CROWTHER *Is this child mine?*
DAINTY *Will you open the door?*
CROWTHER *Is she someone I know?*
DAINTY *In his faltering mind*
 Is unravelling time
 Taking all that he knows?

CROWTHER Are you sure?

DAINTY Course I am. Say my name.

CROWTHER I don't know -

DAINTY Go on. Say it. Say my name, father.

CROWTHER Dainty?

DAINTY There. I knew it. I knew you'd remember. You 'aint changed, you know. Not a bit. Not to me. I can't tell you how pleased I am I've found you.

DAINTY *A tidy nest for such as I
A welcoming fire to keep me warm
What more could anyone ask under darkening
skies?
But shelter from the storm
But shelter from the storm*

CHOIR (joins) *So sings the Cuckoo as she flies
So sings the Cuckoo as she flies
So sings the Cuckoo as she flies*

DAINTY *To keep my own child warm
To keep my own child warm*

CHOIR *Cuckoo (etc)*

DAINTY *Yet still the Robin wakes to sing
Greeting the morning from the thorn
What more could anyone bring to a stranger's
child
A child in Cuckoo form
A child in Cuckoo form*

CHOIR (joins) *So sings the Cuckoo as she flies
So sings the Cuckoo as she flies
So sings the Cuckoo as she flies*

DAINTY *She'll keep my own child warm
She'll keep my own child warm*

DAINTY *Will you welcome me home?
CROWTHER Is this child mine?
DAINTY Will you open the door?
CROWTHER Is she someone I know?
DAINTY In his faltering mind
Is unravelling time?
Taking all that he knows?*

CHOIR *And when the foundling starts to grow
The Cuckoo feathers set*

*There is yet one simple truth that the mother
will know*

*The child is hungry yet
The child is hungry yet
So sings the cuckoo as she flies
So sings the cuckoo as she flies
So sings the cuckoo as she flies*

DAINTY

*The child is hungry yet
The child is hungry yet*

*For nature's ways are always wild
Tell me who would not do the same
And surely anyone here they would have to
agree
In this there lies no blame
In this there lies no blame*

CHOIR (joins)

*The Robin she loves her Cuckoo child
The Robin she loves her Cuckoo child
The Robin she loves her Cuckoo child*

DAINTY

*And such a child I'll be
And such a child I'll be.*

[POPPY comes in and stops in surprise]

POPPY

Sorry. I didn't know you had a visitor.

Beat

DAINTY

Aren't you goin' to introduce us, father. To your good friend. I know she's a friend or why else would she walk straight in without even thinkin to knock?

CROWTHER

Poppy, this - She's Dainty.

POPPY

Father did you say?

DAINTY

His own little girl. That's right.

POPPY

But you never said. I didn't know...

DAINTY That's been a long time. He hardly knew me hisself at first, did you father? But I needn't have worried. What kind of a man forgets his own child?

CROWTHER What is it, Poppy?

POPPY I brought some potted shrimp. With the last of the loaf that'll make decent supper. I'll put it on a tray.

DAINTY Please. Let me do it for him.

POPPY That's no trouble.

DAINTY But you must. You see father an I need to have a talk. 'Aint that right, father? There's a deal we need to catch up on.

POPPY Mr Crowther - do you -

CROWTHER That's fine, Poppy. We'll be all right.

POPPY Shall I come back later?

DAINTY There's no need to trouble yourself. I'm here now.

POPPY Do you want me to go?

CROWTHER Questions! Questions! Too many questions! I don't know what to say. You think I got answers packed like herring in a box? Go. Yes. Go. And leave me be.

 [*POPPY goes.*]

DAINTY I worry about you father, if that's how things are. She seems a bit familiar.

CROWTHER You don't have to worry about me. No body has to worry about me. I can still look after myself.

DAINTY But you shouldn't have to. That's all I'm saying.

CROWTHER Poppy gets anything I need. I manage.

DAINTY I'm sure she does. But that's a job for family, not a stranger from the town.

CROWTHER I manage, I say!

 BEAT

 Dainty?

DAINTY Yes, father.

CROWTHER My daughter?

DAINTY That's right.

CROWTHER My daughter?

DAINTY I've said so, han't I? There isn't nothin' -

CROWTHER [*Interrupting*] I forget things. I - I forget them. They're gone out of my head.

DAINTY I know. They told me.

CROWTHER Not like forgettin' a face or a name that's slipped your tongue. Not like that.

DAINTY You're not well, that's all. That's what it is.

CROWTHER Not like that at all.

DAINTY That don't matter. Really it don't.

CROWTHER Sittin' watchin' the ebb, an' knowing that won't come back. That's what it's like.

DAINTY You need lookin' after, that's all. Why not let me stay a while? Just till your better

CROWTHER Things are disappearin', Dainty.

DAINTY I know, I know.

CROWTHER They're disappearin'.

DAINTY If you want me to stay, you just have to say so.

 BEAT

 Father?

CROWTHER What?

DAINTY I think I'd better, don't you?

CROWTHER P'raps you might. For a short while.

DAINTY Then I will. Of course I will. I have some things to do. But I'll be straight back. Don't you worry, father. I'll take care of you.

SCENE 4

CHOIR *Eyes across the water,
Eyes across the sky
The Watcher on the water
The tide flowing by*

[LEAF joins CROWTHER. And they sit for a moment in silence. Two old friends]

LEAF Watery ol' moon tonight.

CROWTHER There'll be a blow then.

LEAF I dare say.

 BEAT

CROWTHER Who was it owned the Plover?

LEAF Afore me?

CROWTHER Before we brought her down.

LEAF Keeley, his name was.

CROWTHER Keeley. That was it.

LEAF From Beccles.

CROWTHER But she warn't up there. Not up Beccles way.

LEAF No. She was lying by the Cross.

CROWTHER So she was.

LEAF Last time she was used he'd been lighterin' with
her, Ol' Keeley. Carrying ice off Hardley Flood
down to Yarmouth. But she was past all that.

CROWTHER Gawd, she was leaky.

LEAF She was.

CROWTHER No mast. Timbers gone.
We should ha' had a tow.

LEAF No, we'd ha been towed under. We did all right.

CROWTHER Baled her out. Come down on the tide. Made fast...

LEAF Baled her out again.

CROWTHER All the way down the Norwich River.
We drifted onto Breydon under a full moon. I remember that. We thought we were goin' to make it, but damn me if we didn't have to tie her up off the Dickey Works and bale her out again. By the time we got her on the mud it was gettin' light. We sat down on her peelin' deck and watched the sun come up.

LEAF I've lost count of the times I've done that .

BEAT

CROWTHER Waitin for the tide. That never seem like waitin' does it?

LEAF That's just the world drawin' breath.

CHOIR *Eyes across the water,
Eyes across the sky
The Watcher on the water
The tide flowing by*

SCENE 5

DAINTY re-appears. She has JACK in tow.

DAINTY Hello, father - that's only Dainty. Back like I promised.

Jack unshoulders his sack of belongings.

CROWTHER Who's that?

DAINTY Dainty. I just said -

CROWTHER There's someone else.

DAINTY Why of course there is.

CROWTHER Who's there?

DAINTY This is Jack. You remember. Of course you do.
I told you about him. I said he'd be comin' along
with me. And that's fine you said.

JACK You're good an' snug here, Mr Crowther.

CROWTHER But who is he?

JACK A tidy little billet in a cruel world, eh?

CROWTHER Why's he shoutin' like that?

DAINTY He `aint deaf, silly. Are you father?

CROWTHER I can hear as well as the next man.

DAINTY `Course you can.
Look, father. Jack's brought you some herrin' fresh
off the quay. I'll make us some dinner, shall I?

CROWTHER No need. Poppy'll do it.

DAINTY Poppy's not here. She couldn't come.

CROWTHER Why not? Poppy's always here. Is she all right?

DAINTY Don't you worry. I'll go look for her after. Make
sure. We'll both go, won't we Jack?

JACK We will.

CROWTHER Why's he here?

DAINTY Oh, father. What am I goin' to do with you? You'll
forget your own name next.

CROWTHER No -

DAINTY Everyone gets old. Everythin' that flies, walks or swims in the sea. There's nothin' we can do about it. But that's not so bad. So long as there's someone to take care of you. And who's to do that better than your own daughter? An Jack here is strong and kind. Everything's goin' to be all right from now on.

CROWTHER Yes I fergit things. But I can manage. I still get about. I know my way about the lane outside though I han't seen it since you were a child. And the road, an the marsh beyond that. I don't need -

DAINTY But father, father, you said yourself. You told me. Things are goin' out of your head. Ain't that what you said?

CROWTHER If I did, then -

DAINTY Or have you forgot that n'all?

CROWTHER I han't forgot it.

DAINTY Well, then?

CROWTHER That's only sometimes. Tha's all.

DAINTY An' what if - I don't like to think it - but what if some times turned into more times and then all the time. What then? Wouldn't it be better to have your own kin by your side and a man with a strong back to take the strain?

JACK She's right, old man. Your Dainty's right.

DAINTY Of course I am.

SONG

JACK *It's a cruel old world, Mr Crowther
When the night is drawing in
When the pavements they turn cold,
And the lamp is growing dim*

*Lucky's the man
With a friend he can rely on
Lucky's the man
who can bolt his door
You need a pal
To watch the door...*

DAINTY *Lucky's the man
With an angel here to watch him
A fire to warm him*

JACK *A pal to protect him*

JACK
BOTH *Who could ask for more?
Who could ask for more?*

DAINTY *The springtime is done, Mr Crowther
You won't hear the nightingale call*

JACK *The summer is gone, Mr Crowther
The swallows have all fled
Now the dying leaves must fall*

JACK *There are thieves out there in the shadows
Men with a way with a knife...
Men who will smile as your eyes close
And the curtain comes down on your life..*

CHOIR *There are thieves out there in the shadows
Men with a way with a knife...
Men who will smile as your eyes close
And the curtain comes down on your life..*

JACK *So what's to be done, Mr Crowther?
When night treads soft in the hall.*

*When the mist turns to fog, Mr Crowther
And your friends turn their faces to the wall*

DAINTY *You need a pal
A friend you can rely on
You need a pal
To watch the door
And here I am
A shoulder you can lean on*

BOTH *So let the leaves fall
And let the night come on (repeat ad lib)*

You don't need to worry no more.

JACK So just you sit back and let us worry about
 everythin'. It'll all be took care of.

CROWTHER Dainty? What do you say?

DAINTY I say we do whatever you think is best, father.

JACK She's a smart girl, your Dainty. You're lucky to
 have her.

DAINTY An' I agree with you – if there's somethin' to be
 done, then four hands is better than two.

CROWTHER I said that?

DAINTY You see? You will forgit your name next.

JACK That's all settled then.

CROWTHER I'm Crowther-

JACK All tied up nice with a ribbon on top.

CROWTHER That's my name. Benjamin Crowther. I'm
 Benjamin Crowther.

SCENE 6

SIR MORTON is creeping up on a butterfly. He carries a collapsible net.

POPPY Beg pardon - Sir Morton, sir -

He signals her to hush. Sweeps with the net.

SIR MORTON There!

*He's caught something.
They both look.*

Aglais Urticae. You probably know it as a -

POPPY Tortoiseshell.

SIR MORTON Exactly. Well done.

He extracts the butterfly carefully from the net and transfers it into a glass jar.

Not what I was hoping for. But better than nothing.

POPPY There was a Dark Green down on the Denes this mornin'.

SIR MORTON A Dark Green? Oh, I don't think so. Probably a Wall, Poppy. They're very similar in colour.

POPPY No, she was a Dark Green. Silver patches on the underwing. Probably blown down from Horsey. The Queen of Spain has the same patches, only larger, but she has rounder wings an the books say there

han't never been one in Norfolk though there's some say they've seen them.

SIR MORTON The Queen of Spain Fritillary? How on earth do you know about that?

POPPY Mr Crowther used to get me to collect anythin' unusual an' describe it to him. He learned about them from Leaf that used to live on Breydon. He was the one said he'd seen the Queen of Spain.

SIR MORTON They were thick as thieves those two. Between them they probably knew more about the fauna of Yarmouth than anyone alive. He'd really seen a Queen of Spain?

POPPY That's what Mr Crowther said.

SIR MORTON Then I'd wager he did. How is Ben? Any change?

POPPY That's just it. That's hard to say.

SIR MORTON Oh? Why's that?

POPPY I han't seen him. Not since his daughter come.

SIR MORTON His daughter?

POPPY That's right. She's called Dainty.

SIR MORTON Ben Crowther has a daughter?

POPPY You din't know?

SIR MORTON I must say it comes as a bit of a surprise. He's never mentioned it.

POPPY No, he han't.

BEAT

SIR MORTON You think something's wrong?

POPPY I only know that I'm used to lookin' out for him an' now he say he don't need anyone 'cause his daughter is goin' to do it all. 'An that don't seem right.

SIR MORTON You haven't taken to this daughter of his. Am I correct?

POPPY It 'aint just that -

SIR MORTON Your concern does you credit, Poppy. But family is a precious thing. And we mustn't begrudge Ben Crowther his secrets.

POPPY P'raps you'd call on him, just the same?

SIR MORTON I'm afraid I take the 3 oclock London train. But don't worry. On my return I'll be sure and make a point of meeting this long lost relative.

POPPY Thank you, sir.

SIR MORTON [*GOING*] In the meantime, find me a Dark Green and there's a capon in it for your mother.

POPPY Thank you again, sir.

 [*He's gone.*]

 I'll be sure to leave it in the church yard where she can find it.

SCENE 7

*Crowther is in his chair. Dainty nosing around.
Jack appears.*

JACK Well?

DAINTY [*shakes head*]

JACK There has to be somethin'. He can't live on fresh
air.

DAINTY We've looked. There's nothin'. We should go, Jack.

JACK He must have a nest egg. Somethin' for a rainy
day. An' where's his rent money?

DAINTY Maybe you should ask him?

JACK Don't get clever with me girl.

CROWTHER Poppy?

DAINTY No, that's your Dainty.

CROWTHER Dainty, is it?

DAINTY Yes, father?

CROWTHER What's happenin' back there?

JACK Nothin', old man. You rest your bones. Everythin's
just fine and dandy.

CROWTHER Has Poppy been?

DAINTY I'd have said, wouldn't I? If Poppy was here. So
don't you fret.

JACK Well, aren't you goin' to tell him?

DAINTY Tell him what?

JACK You saw her, didn't you love? You saw Poppy in the market.

DAINTY [*puzzled*] I did that's right.

JACK Tell your old man what she had to say.

DAINTY What... [*she has no idea*] you mean about...

JACK How she has to go away for a while. How that aunt of hers has found her a job. In Norwich.

DAINTY Oh, that - yes. That's right. Poppy's gone to Norwich, father. She's to work for a sea captain. He's a very important man.

JACK That's right. A naval man. She's a lucky girl is Poppy.

CROWTHER In Norwich? Then how's she goin' to get my tea?

DAINTY She doesn't need to you silly thing. Not no more, does she father. Not now we're here.

CROWTHER Norwich. What's she doin' in Norwich? Poppy should be here.

DAINTY I'll tell her, shall I?

CROWTHER You do that. You tell her from me.

DAINTY I will, father. I'll tell her.

JACK Bloody old fool.

DAINTY There's nothin' here, Jack. We should get away from here.

JACK Not yet.

DAINTY But if there's nothin' to be...

JACK I said not yet!

CROWTHER gets to his feet and makes for the door.

DAINTY Where are you goin', father?

[JACK moves the chair to block him in]

CROWTHER Did he move the chair? Tell him he can't move the chairs.

DAINTY No - it was -

CROWTHER I can't get about if he move things.

JACK No one's moved anything, old man.

CROWTHER I shall go to Poppy's.

DAINTY Not now, father. Poppy's not there.

JACK picks up the table and puts it across the door. CROWTHER stumbles into it. He stands, trying to get his bearings.

CROWTHER The door. Which way's the door?

DAINTY Let me help you father -

She takes his arm and begins to lead him round the room in circles.

You're a little muddled that's all. Come on, this way.

JACK moves CROWTHER's chair to one side. The geography of the room is completely scrambled

DAINTY Why not sit down? Have a little rest. Things'll sort themselves out in no time. Here's your chair, look...

CROWTHER I might do that.

DAINTY There.

We can't keep him locked up in here.

JACK Shut up and let me think.

CROWTHER The spooney.

JACK What?

CROWTHER Where's the spooney?

JACK [*to DAINTY*] What's he on about?

DAINTY Where's what father?

CROWTHER The spoonbill. Where is she?

The look round at the cases trying to find what he's looking for.

JACK Big old thing with a bill like a banjo?

CROWTHER The spooney.

JACK adjusts his position.

DAINTY It's over there.

CROWTHER Where?

JACK Here.

That's a fine bird, I'll say that. Must be worth a few pounds that one.

CROWTHER There's another in Lord Farndon's collection. But not so fine as that one.

JACK So what would you get for her if she was sold?

CROWTHER She's not for sale.

JACK Course she 'aint. But just for the sake of argument.

CROWTHER Hard to say.

JACK But try.

CROWTHER I don't know what she'd fetch today. But I can tell you what she cost.

JACK What's that old man?

CROWTHER Mor'n most men would want to pay...

Enter out of breath, BETTY.

SCENE 8

BETTY Did you get the message?

CROWTHER What message?

BETTY We sent the boy Petty. Don't tell me he han't bin?

CROWTHER I han't seen nobody.

BETTY I'll skin his ginger hide. You see if I don't. That boy's been askin' for a leatherin'...

CROWTHER Betty, Betty - What message?

BETTY Spoonbills. Two of `em. Duffels Drain. You wan't to get down there Sir Morton say. He's on his way already.

CROWTHER I'm there!

Enter Tom (double Jack)

TOM You heard?

CROWTHER I heard.

TOM What you takin' that old thing for?

CROWTHER What's wrong with it?

TOM Ain't that Bob's old gun?

CROWTHER That might be.

TOM That's got a muzzle worn so thin you could trim your nails with it.

CROWTHER That's as maybe. But mine's with old Hickling on Fuller's Hill. This one's retired by rights. But you know what they say...

*We'd all like a gun
By Purdey and Son*

*Engraved with figures so fine
With a glistening stock
As smooth as a rock
Of walnut oiled till she shine*

*We'd all like to shoot
In gentleman's boots
With a gun dog bred for its style*

CROWTHER But we can't can we? We must do the best with
what we have like our poor fathers before us.

*A muzzle as thin
As a piece of old tin
A stock that's cracked and repaired*

*A barrel as true
As a promise that's due
When the beer flows late in the bar*

*When out on the marsh
With a bird in your sights
There's one thing you must understand
The best gun of all
When all's said and done
Is the gun that you hold in your hand.*

SIR MORTON Morning Ben. What are our chances?

CROWTHER Good I'd say. If the mist hold we can get in the
drain before they see us. Then she's your for the
takin'.

SIR MORTON Then lets get moving. There's a breeze getting up.
I've waited a long time for this. Get us close and
I'll do the rest.

CROWTHER We pushed out the punt at low water slack and took the south wall. The flood soon pick us up and bring us through Cobholm The mist was startin' to thin a bit as a breeze got up off the Humberstone Marshes. As we crept out into open water a flight of pink-foot come in from over Lockgate Farm. We paid em no mind. We hardly made a sound. They wouldn't see us. The old punt was grey as a Breydon mornin'. We flattened ourselves close to the waterline and crept on.

SIR MORTON They're beautiful birds. They've flown all the way from the Black Sea and the Caucus Mountains. Two thousand miles of empty air with their necks stretched out before them like swans. And now they're in a Norfolk drain sweeping their absurd spatulate bills from side to side, sieving out tiny crustacea -

CROWTHER And then we're into the drain ourselves. Nothin' to see. Just mud walls a yard away on either side. And the sound of running water as the tide start to creep onto the flats. We din't have to move a muscle, just let the flood do the work.

SIR MORTON I had my Purdey loaded with a single shot. The second barrel was empty. A true sportsman should give the bird a chance. If he's foolish enough to miss with the first shot, he doesn't deserve the second. I've said as much to Ben more than once. I believe he's one of the few men who understands.

A look from CROWTHER

CROWTHER I understand a load of old squat when I hear it. And there's a time to say so and, trust me, this 'aint it.

SIR MORTON I heard Ben whisper -

CROWTHER Now, Sir Morton, now –

SIR MORTON The gun was already at my shoulder. I felt my
finger tighten on the trigger. And then – and then
the bird turned her head. She turned and looked
straight at me.

CROWTHER Sir Morton, sir -

SIR MORTON And I'm ashamed to say that looking into that
dark eye - which seemed to belong to a creature
so strange it might have flown in from a Jurassic
swamp – I hesitated.

BEAT

And then everything happened at once. The birds
were climbing into the sky. I fired and missed.
Ben's first shot brought down the leading bird. He
turned for the second. Pulled the trigger -

CROWTHER I didn't hear the sound. The breech peeled back like
it was made of soft flesh, not iron, fragments
tearing my skin, the burning powder, and such a
light' in my eyes -

SIR MORTON *He loaded the gun
He shouldered the gun
And shot the light out of the sky*

*He dropped the old gun
An cursed what he'd done*

CHOIR *An the dark rolled in like the tide.*

SCENE 9

POPPY emerges on to the marsh and stands with her eyes closed, arms outstretched as [on sound] a flight of geese pass overhead. LEAF sitting outside The Plover is watching her.

POPPY approaches The Plover and pauses, wondering whether to go in. She passes LEAF without seeing him.

Inside she sits at the little table and looks about her.

LEAF

[Without turning to look at her.] Behind you. There's a loose board. Give it a ding.

POPPY turns and looks. Moves a loose plank and takes out a small canvas pouch. She carries it out into the sunlight to inspect it.

She'll be all right. It's dry enough in there.

POPPY carefully opens the pouch and takes out the old monocular that belonged to LEAF.

Go on, gal. Look.

POPPY lifts it to her eye and is delighted by what she sees.

The world is full of the sound of birds.

Eventually she puts it back in the bag and is about to replace it where she found it.

Keep it. You're gonna' need, girl.

POPPY changes her mind. And slips it in her pocket.

SCENE 10

CROWTHER is in his chair. In a semi-stupour. DAINTY fusses round. The spoonbill's case is open. The bird is missing. DAINTY closes the empty glass case.

DAINTY

So what shall we talk about, father? Jack won't be long. He had some business to take care of. He'll be back soon. He's a good man, Jack is. He'll look after us...

We can talk about the things we did when I was small. You and your little girl, Dainty. That'll help you remember, won't it?

Now let's see. We had a little dog, didn't we? An' a cat. An' a nice house with no rats and clean linen on the beds. It was lovely. An we was happy, so happy - An you'd do anythin' for your little girl. Anythin' she asked...

What about the day the soldiers came? You remember that. We went to see them, didn't we? You and your Dainty. I wanted to go so bad. Do you remember? It was down at the Albert Dock. Everyone wanted to be there to see the Dragoons goin' off to war. With their red jackets and their fine horses. You took me, didn't you? You took your little girl. What a day that was.

DAINTY

*Fine young men shipped off, off to war
All the jacketed soldiers
To cross the sea to fight the Boer
All the jacketed soldiers
To Ladysmith and Bloemfontein
Never to see their home again*

*All the jacketed
All the jacketed
All the jacketed soldiers*

I just wanted to see them, that's all. But I want
dонт' get, in't that what they say? Even if she's set
her heart on it. That's just the way it is. At least
that's the way it is if your pa likes a drink. And he
did. He liked a drink more than his life.

[*CROWTHER stirs, momentarily distressed.*]

That's all right. I'm here. Your Dainty's here. There
- that's better, ain't it?

*Who wouldn't take his little girl
Down to see the soldiers
Down to watch the marching bands
High up on his shoulders
Who wouldn't cheer the red Dragoons
As empire's sun did sink
Who wouldn't take his little girl?
The man who likes a drink.*

I was a terror then. Oh, warn't I just? I deserved
what he did to me. I deserved it. That's what he
said.

One day he walked out - shut the door

CHOIR *Like all the jacketed soldiers*

DAINTY *Without a look back - was seen no more*

CHOIR *Like all the jacketed soldiers*

DAINTY *And tho' the taste of fear remained
He never did come home again*

CROWTHER Poppy –

CHOIR *One day he walked out - shut the door
 Like all the jacketed soldiers
Without a look back - was seen no more
 Like all the jacketed soldiers
And tho' the taste of fear remained
He never did come home again*

*Like all the jacketed
All the jacketed
All the jacketed soldiers*

INTERVAL

SCENE 11

[A storm. JACK has been dreaming. He wakes with a start and cries out.]

JACK No!

[He's badly rattled. He grabs a candle and struggles to light it.]

Come on, come on. Don't do this. Not now.

[The candle lights.]

There. That's better. That's not so bad. That's not so bad, Jack. A little dream, that's all it is. Over now. Over

and done with. All done. Sleep shadows. Nothin' more.
Shapes to scare a child.

[He looks at his hand. It's shaking. He starts to rummage through his pockets.]

You need a little somethin', that's all, Jack. A little paregoric. That'll see you right. Where are you hidin'? You're here somewhere. *[He takes out his little bottle.]* Ah. What's a man without a little paregoric, eh? *[He takes a swig.]*

[He sings to himself]

*It's a cruel old world, Jack me darlin'
When the darkness starts to creep
When dreams walk abroad, me old china
An a man's too scared to fall...*

Who's there? Who's there, I say?

No one. No one at all. That's just the wind off the sea.
Invadin' a man's sleep.

*There are dreams out there in the shadows
Terrors that wake in the night
Visions that creep when your eyes close...*

[He takes another slug]

That's bettter. God bless you an' all his apothecaries.

*Lucky's the man
With a friend he can rely on
Lucky's the man...*

Don't give out on me now.

[It's empty.]

Damn it all! Damn it to hell!

CHOIR *A new tide makes
The wind blows cold
On Breydon water...*

[Exit JACK. LEAF joins CROWTHER, who has his coat pulled up high against the wind.]

CROWTHER How bad?

LEAF Water's already at the top of the wall - an' still two hours to high water.

CROWTHER The river's tide-locked. When the surge hits, she'll come over.

LEAF That'll be '97 all over again.

CROWTHER 28th November 1897. The glass fell for 24 hours straight. Han't never seen a gale like it. The town was hit from both sides. After the South Wall went water come in off the marshes and met the water comin' in off the sea. Tide makin' everywhere, east and west. Cobholm was bad. Boats brook agin the roofs of their boathouses. Then the North Wall went. That took a week to close the breach. Another two before the water went down.

LEAF That'll go hard on the Plover.

CROWTHER Nothin' we can do now. Nothin' we can do...

The storm abates, leaving Crowther alone in his room surrounded by empty glass cases. The birds have all gone.

Nothin' we can do. Nothin' at all. Nothin we can do -

DAINTY *[arriving]* Father? What is it?

CROWTHER Nothin' we can do. Nothin', nothin' at all, there's nothin'

DAINTY Hush now. Everythin's fine -

LEAF leaves them to it.

Everythin's fine.

ENTER JACK

SCENE 12

DAINTY What did you get?

He plonks the money down on the table. DAINTY looks.

Well, that's good, 'aint it?

JACK Two shillin? How far's that gonna take us?

DAINTY Well, that was only a little 'un. A pretty colour. But no
bigger'n a sparrer.

It don't matter, Jack. We done all right. It's the last of
them anyway.

He opens the drawer. Takes out some coins.

JACK Is that it? Where's the rest of it?

DAINTY Spent, Jack. There's enough to see us through. If we're
careful.

JACK It can't be spent already.

DAINTY We still got to eat. And feed the old boy. It all adds up.

BEAT

An a drink now an' then.

JACK A man can't do his thinkin' dry!

DAINTY No, Jack. He can't.

JACK He needs a glass.

DAINTY Course he does. I wouldn't say no different.

JACK Look at im'. He could be took off any minute. Then what? The day he draws his last breath the game's up.

DAINTY He 'aint gonna die Jack. Not yet.

JACK It ain't right. We could have left him. He owes us. You can't expect to be looked after and not put your hand in your pocket. That 'aint fair. Debts has to be paid.

DAINTY But he ain't got nothin' to pay with.

JACK He's got this place.

DAINTY It ain't his.

JACK You don't know that. He says it is.

DAINTY He don't know what he's sayin'

JACK But he don't pay rent does he? Just suppose – for a minute – just suppose he's right. Suppose his old man built this place. Or his old man. I dunno, years ago. An Crowthers have lived here ever since. It'd come down to him, wouldn't it?

DAINTY It might.

JACK 'Course it would. So what happens if he dies? When he dies.

It goes to the parish. That's what happens.

DAINTY It don't matter. We'd still have to leave.

JACK Unless he made a will.

Unless he made a will, Dainty.

But he didn't, did he? Cos if he did, we'd have found it. Oh, that was carless old man. An you with a daughter to look after. Not leave a will even when the old reaper's close enough to shake your hand?

How you gonna take care of your family? An those that looked out for you?

We're gonna have to put that right.

DAINTY He can't get a will now. No justice would make it.

JACK We don't need a justice. Just a paper that says what he wants. Signed and dated and witnessed, an' it's all legal.

DAINTY But you still need someone to write it' -

JACK is staring at DAINTY

No, Jack, I can't.

JACK You got your letters 'aint you?

DAINTY Not for somethin' like this. I can't do it, Jack.

JACK You can.

DAINTY No, I -

JACK You'll do what I tell you girl!

Oh, this is just perfect.

JACK

*The birds might have gone
But we're still sittin' pretty
Our luck hasn't walked out the door
You think we're all done
But the race isn't won
We'll suck at Luck's tittie some more*

*It's in our own hands
Yes we're still sittin' pretty
There's no one can take it away
It's ours for the takin'
Ours for the losin'
So let's suck at Luck's tittie I say*

*Life's what you make it
We're still sittin' pretty
It's all your own fault if you're poor
If we're strong and we fake it
We'll write it and take it
We'll suck at Luck's tittie some more*

*Life's just a gamble
A stroll or a shambles
Just a roll of dice
Can make virtue vice
I'm no loser we're still sittin' pretty*

DAINTY

*Out of my hands now
Oh why do I help him
Help him deceive an old man who is dying
Can't raise a hand now
No more prevent him
Than call back the sun when the nightjar is flying*

*Now the nightmare's come
It's too late to run
Back to the city*

*Is there another way
Do I have to stay
Not fly, quickly fly, back to the city*

*No need to wonder
Only to wait
It's too late, far too late, too late to fly
Back to the city
The lovely city*

*Time will unravel
Who lives and dies
By and by*

[Knocking. POPPY at the door outside.]

JACK *[to DAINTY]* Who's that?

DAINTY I dunno.

JACK Well go look then.

CROWTHER gets to his feet.

Sit down!

DAINTY Not now, father.

CROWTHER I have to get home.

DAINTY You are home, father. Now just you rest.

CROWTHER I have to get home.

Louder knocking.

JACK Who's there?

POPPY *[Outside]* That's Poppy. I brought a pie for Mr Crowther.

JACK You can leave it on the step. I'll see that he gets it.

POPPY I'd rather give it to him myself.

CROWTHER I have to get home.

DAINTY Let's just sit down, father. Shall we?

CROWTHER I have to get home,

CROWTHER struggles with his jacket.

JACK He's not well enough for visitors. Not today.

POPPY That won't take a minute.

DAINTY Sit down, father!

[JACK goes out to POPPY.]

JACK I'll take it.

POPPY Can I see him?

JACK I told you. He's not hisself.

POPPY Then I'll come back tomorrow.

JACK Don't bother. He don't need no visitors. We're lookin' after him now.

POPPY Mr Crowther!

JACK grabs POPPY

JACK Listen to me girl. You're not wanted here. Understand?
Come back and thing's'll go badly for you. Very bad.
Now get out of here. Go!

SCENE 13

[SONG/MUSIC transition... "Eyes across the water"]

LEAF wanders in and sits down next to CROWTHER.

LEAF There's avocet down on the Castle flats. As pretty a sight as you could want to see.

CROWTHER You don't say?

LEAF Nine of them. Prickin' about in the shallows.

CROWTHER They can count themselves lucky. Before we had a Watcher they wouldn't ha' lasted the mornin'.

LEAF They might not yet if he don't get his backside down from the Bowlin' Green.

CROWTHER Tha's true. There's still plenty find it a hard thing to pass up a rare 'un, Protection Act or no.

LEAF Bently was the best Watcher. He had Breydon in his veins.

CROWTHER He weren't official though. He was before the Act.

LEAF Official be blowed. What makes a Watcher 'aint the hat an' the title. There's been Watchers here since before the Act gave them a name. An ther'll be Watchers long after the Act's bin forgot.

CROWTHER That's true enough.

LEAF They go all the way back, further than anyone can remember, each handin' on to the next. The line han't never been broken, I reckon.

SONG

Eyes across the water

*Eyes against the sky
The Watcher on the water
The tide flowing by*

*You'll see them when the shadows fall
Along the southern wall
You'll hear them in the twilight
In the whistler's lonely call*

*And Breydon rests and Breydon waits
And Breydon's blessed them all*

*Eyes across the water
Eyes against the sky
The Watcher on the water
The tide flowing by*

LEAF They're not like other folk, the Watchers. This place grow on them until their life's filled up with it. They love every tide an drain. Life ain't worth livin' till they got eyes acrost the water.

There's always been Watchers on Breydon an there always will be.

CROWTHER She's in safe hands, then?

LEAF She is.

SCENE 14

JACK has paper and pen. CROWTHER sits quietly folding and refolding his jacket.

JACK (*beginning to dictate*) I, Benjamin -
Well, write girl.

DAINTY I...

JACK Benjamin Crowther of Breydon and Yarmouth

DAINTY (*writing*) Ben-jamin Crow-ther -

JACK (*to Crowther*) You see old man? You're gettin' a will after all. Gawd, you're lucky we're here to look after you.

DAINTY Of -

JACK Breydon and Yarmouth

DAINTY Of Breydon and Yarmouth.

BEAT

JACK It has to sound legal.

DAINTY So what do I put?

JACK I'm thinkin'.

He paces.

Do solemnly swear -

DAINTY That's good.

JACK By this book in my hand.

DAINTY (*writes*) By this book in my hand.

JACK That bein' as sound in my mind as a church bell -

DAINTY (*writes*) - as a church bell.

JACK (*to Crowther*) Hear that? You're sound as a bell in that noggin' of yours. That's ripe, 'aint it?

DAINTY What's next?

JACK Well, let's come to it.
This is my will now for hell I am bound.

DAINTY Hell. We can't say that. Better put death, eh? Now for
death I am bound?

JACK Write it.

Read what it says.

DAINTY I Benjamin Crowther of Breydon and Yarmouth
Do solemnly swear on this book in my hand
That being as sound in my mind as a church bell
This is my will now for death I am bound.

*DAINTY and JACK huddle over the paper, continuing the
draft.*

CHOIR *[almost a whisper] Those that took care of me should
be remembered
That sat by my bed as my life slipped away
Dainty my daughter and Jack gave me water
When thirst had my throat and my lips turned to clay.*

*To them I bequeath every stick that I own
The birds on the walls and the rugs on the floor
To them goes all of my lands and my cottage
All it contains and the key to the door*

JACK Let me see.

DAINTY shows him the finished will.

Which is the part that says about the cottage.

She shows him.

And that's his name there?

DAINTY It is, Jack.

JACK Ha. That's it then. All done. They can't touch us.

DAINTY Careful – the ink 'aint dry yet.

JACK Now the envelope. Write it. Benjamin Crowther, My Will.

She does so.

There.

JACK waves the letter in the air to dry it. Then folds it carefully and puts it in the envelope.

[Holding the envelope aloft.] See that? You know what that is? That's our ticket away from here. We can go where we want. We can go to Canada. We been to France. We can do the parlez-vous. It's our new life, Dainty. That's what that is.

He sets the envelope in a prominent position.

SCENE 15

CROWTHER starts to undress.

DAINTY Father, don't do that.

She starts to do up his shirt.

CROWTHER Who are you? Are you Poppy?

DAINTY No father, Poppy's gone away.

CROWTHER You're not Poppy.

DAINTY Poppy's in London with her sea captain.

CROWTHER You're not Poppy.

DAINTY Here sit down. Let's get this back on shall we?

CROWTHER Who are you? Are you Poppy?

DAINTY No, father -

CROWTHER Tide's full. I need to get home.

DAINTY It's not time. Not yet. But it will be soon. An' you need to be ready when it is, don't you? So let's put these things back on, shall we? So you're ready. Shall we do that?

He looks at her closely. For a moment the mists clear.

CROWTHER Dainty.

DAINTY That's right.

CROWTHER You're Dainty.

DAINTY Your little girl.

CROWTHER You're my daughter.

DAINTY I am. That's who I am.

CROWTHER Dainty - Dainty - I don't know -
Nothin's right - nothin' -
That's all of a - nothin's right.

DAINTY It will be. Don't you worry.

CROWTHER Help me?

DAINTY 'Course I will.

CROWTHER I'm glad you come home. Are you goin' away again?

DAINTY No father. I'm not goin' away. I'll look after you. Don't you worry.

CROWTHER *Yes I know this child*
DAINTY *Yes the sun will shine*
CROWTHER *Yes I know her voice*
DAINTY *Everything is just fine*
 I won't disappear
 If unravelling time
 Takes all that you know

CROWTHER Dainty. You're Dainty.

CROWTHER *I'm glad you come home*
DAINTY *Everything will be fine*
CROWTHER *Please don't leave me alone*
DAINTY *I'll be here all the time*
 I won't disappear
 If unravelling time
 Takes all that you know

DAINTY Rest a little now. It's goin' to be all right.

A sullen JACK returns and slumps in a chair watching
CROWTHER

JACK Look at him. He's gone already. There's nothin' left in that head of his. Crack it open an there'd be nothin' but fog an' vacancy.

DAINTY That's not true. He was back just now. 'Afore you come in.

JACK That won't last.

DAINTY You don't know. He might live a long time yet.

JACK You said it girl. An' where does that leave us, eh?

DAINTY We're all right. You said so yourself. Now we got the will. We're all right.

JACK What's gonna' happen is gonna' happen. Sooner or later. So why not sooner? Better for everyone, I say.

DAINTY Don't talk like that.

JACK The old boy's mad as a hare. No one'd be surprised to come home and find him danglin' from a rafter. Or suckin' on a shotgun.

DAINTY Jack - you can't.

JACK Since when did you come over sentimental?

CROWTHER starts folding clothes

CROWTHER I need to get home -

DAINTY Hush, father -

CROWTHER I dont' know where I am.

DAINTY Hush father -

JACK He 'aint your blasted father!

DAINTY I know. I know it, Jack.

JACK [*storming out*] Gawd, a woman's head.

DAINTY Hush now, father. It's all right. Everythin's all right.

SCENE 16

POPPY is wandering the marsh with LEAF's monocular when DAINTY appears.

POPPY turns away

DAINTY Wait -

Poppy, please.

POPPY pauses

DAINTY I know you have no reason to like me. Course I do.

POPPY Then what do you want?

DAINTY Your help.

POPPY Why should I help you? Even supposin' I could. You're no friend to me. Nor to Ben Crowther, neither even if you are who you say you are.

DAINTY You ask him an' he'll tell you if I'm his daughter or not.

POPPY I can't because the door's shut on me. If you really were his daughter and cared about him you wouldn't see it happen.

DAINTY I didn't have no choice.

POPPY Course you did.

DAINTY You don't know Jack. You don't know what he's like.

POPPY turns to go

DAINTY He still talks about you. Where's Poppy, he says. Over and over.
He repeats himself. The same thing. Again an' again.

POPPY Then why can't I see him? Why not let me help him?

DAINTY Jack says-

POPPY Jack, Jack - I don't care about Jack.

DAINTY Then you should. Jack has plans. He's always got plans. He thinks to get his hands on the cottage.

POPPY An' how's he gonna do that?

DAINTY He thinks the old boy might give it to him.

POPPY But he can't -

DAINTY You don't know that. He's confused. The old man's not sure of anythin' any more.

POPPY He's got worse then?

DAINTY nods.

That makes no difference. That don't belong to him. The cottage.

DAINTY It 'ain't his?

POPPY That's Sir Morton's. He took Crowther in after the accident. When he was blinded.

DAINTY I knew it. I told him.

POPPY Much worse?

DAINTY It's bad. He don't know where he is. He don't know anythin' at all. He's still sittin' there in his chair. But it's

like he's gone. It's like that most of the time. An' then sometimes the fog clear a bit. An he comes back. But it don't last. It breaks your heart, Poppy.

POPPY Then your Jack's got a nice surprise waitin', han't he?

DAINTY He's got a will, Poppy. Jack has got a will.

POPPY He can't have. Ben Crowther couldn't make one.

DAINTY He's got one all the same.

POPPY Then it's useless

DAINTY He don't know that. Jack don't know that.

POPPY Then tell him.

DAINTY You really don't want to be the one to do that.

POPPY I don't understand -

DAINTY I told you. You don't know Jack. An a will ain't no good to him while the old man's still drawin' breath.

She produces a key.

Get him out of there, Poppy. Get him out of there.

She hurries away.

SCENE 16a

CHOIR *Eyes across the water...*

CROWTHER Still, 'aint it? There was an easterly but that's dropped right away now.

LEAF Breydon's full. That'll run strong through Yarmouth on the ebb.

BEAT

CROWTHER Will she always be here, do you think, ol' Breydon?

LEAF Why shouldn't she be?

CROWTHER You go stand on the dunes at Horsey with the wind comin' in off the sea 'an a spring tide. That's like the water is lappin' at your doorstep. The river tide-locked, another surge', a bit of weather - that wouldn't take much. An if the sea come in along the coast an' her walls went - what'd be left of Breydon then?

LEAF She's mud and reed and soft sand. You can't break that. She'll give and she'll bend. She might look different. But she'll be there.

CROWTHER She'll look different all right if we're under water and there's a Scotch fleet unloading herring at Acle.

LEAF Even then, she'll still be giving someone a livin'.

CROWTHER We never did get rich, did we?

LEAF Din't we?

CROWTHER If we did, I missed it.

LEAF No you din't. Getting' rich out here is easy. All you have to do is take notice. The more you know, the more you hold. An' you an' me, we both hold Breydon.

CROWTHER Tha's true enough.

BEAT

LEAF Ebb'll be startin' soon.

[He gets up to leave.]

BEAT

LEAF That won't be long now.

LEAF leaves.

CROWTHER I know it.

SCENE 17

CROWTHER strips off till he's in his underclothes. POPPY appears.

POPPY Mr Crowther?

CROWTHER I don't know. I don't know at all.

POPPY What ha' they done to you? What ha' they done?

Mr Crowther? Ben? Tha's Poppy -

CROWTHER I don't know. I don't know at all. I don't know...

POPPY You're not well. Tha's all it is. You been poorly. Ben?

CROWTHER I don't know.

POPPY Do you know me, Mr Crowther? Ben?

CROWTHER I don't know.

He looks at her for the first time.

I don't know where I am.

POPPY Tha's all right. You're at home. Tha's like a storm come in, tha's all. You remember how Breydon disappear in a storm? That'll clear again. Then you'll see.
Why don't we get you dressed. And go for a little walk.

She starts to get him into his clothes.

CROWTHER I don't know where I am -

POPPY But you will. When we get you out of here.

*Do you remember at all?
Is it there in your brain?
Can you still walk the walls
Round the muddy terrain
Of Old Breydon.*

You remember, don't you Ben? What it was like? When a storm come in?

*The frets and the blows
The mist and the rain
When the frost held her hard
And the ice in her drains
Was like iron?*

*How you walked in the dawn
And saw the snipe rise
And the sun burn a path
In the west as it die
An' the salt tide give way to the fresh?*

You mustn't be sad, Ben. No, don't you be sad.

*You lived your life wild
Under Breydon skies
You're still the fortunate one.*

CROWTHER Is that - you?

POPPY You know who I am?

CROWTHER I do. You're Dainty.

POPPY No, Mr Crowther. I'm not Dainty.

JACK [*arriving*] No she 'aint.

JACK grabs a poker

DAINTY Jack - no!

JACK Why not? You creep into a man's house like a common thief. What do you expect? He's entitled to defend what's his, 'aint he?

DAINTY Jack -

JACK The law's behind him. He's entitled -

DAINTY She 'aint taken nothin', Jack.

JACK The law'll back him.

POPPY If there are thieves here I know who they are. You've stripped the place bare -

CROWTHER [*Distressed. Getting to his feet.*] I don't know. I don't know at all! I don't know!

POPPY turns to him. Tries to calm him.

POPPY It's all right.

CROWTHER I don't know, I don't know -

POPPY There. It's all right.

*DAINTY pulls JACK aside. Whispers urgently in his ear.
He appears to calm down.*

JACK Stripped the place? Course we have. An' you know why? For him there. To pay for lookin' after him. We didn't want nothin'. But he didn't want charity he said. He insisted. Didn't he Dainty?

He crashes the poker onto the table top.

Dainty!

DAINTY Yes. Yes he did.

JACK Sell it all. That's what he said. Because it's all yours anyway. That's right. It's ours. Our goods. You know what this is? That's a will.

DAINTY Jack -

JACK The old man's last will and testament. And what it says is that it all comes to us.

DAINTY Jack - Jack listen -

JACK Shut up!
The cottage and everythin' in it. Now or later, what's it matter, he said? And it's all signed and legal. We done what's best for the old man. Anyone can see that.

CROWTHER Dainty - Where's Dainty?

DAINTY I'm here father.

JACK You see? Family, that's what counts. That's what matters in the end. Now you'd better leave while you still can. Go on, get out -

POPPY I am. I'm going to the -

JACK GET OUT!

POPPY runs.

DAINTY That's it Jack. It's all up now. We can't stay.

JACK Don't talk daft.

DAINTY They'll catch us, Jack. She's gone to get help.

JACK Don't matter who she gets, they can't touch us.

DAINTY You don't understand, Jack.

JACK They can't touch us.

DAINTY No -

JACK Let 'em try and we'll see who comes out on top -

DAINTY It 'aint his. The cottage. It don't belong to him.

JACK We got the will.

DAINTY It's Sir Morton's.

JACK No, no. He signed it. It's ours.

DAINTY That don't matter -

JACK He signed it. So they can't do nothin'

DAINTY It's worthless, Jack!

She grabs the will. Tears it up.

It's worthless! Don't you see?

A terrible calm comes over JACK.

Jack, no. I 'aint done nothin' - It weren't worth the paper - Jack, no, Don't Jack. Please -

But it's too late. JACK launches himself at DAINTY. She doesn't have a chance. He's shocked to find she's not moving. JACK hurries upstairs.

CROWTHER Dainty? Is that you Dainty?

CROWTHER gets out of his chair.

Dainty? Where are you girl?

CROWTHER stumbles into DAINTY's lifeless body. Bends down, begins to trace her outline with his hands.

There you are. Don't lie down there. Dainty?

CHOIR *[Sings] The curve of her neck
The broken bone of her shoulder
Skin that's growing colder
As the life's blood drains away
The icy touch of your lips
The missing beat of a heart that..*

*Dared to dream a new life
Wild and free
Like the sea
Yet even as you dreamed
And spread your wings to fly
Below a room was waiting
The place where you would die.*

CROWTHER My daughter...

JACK reappears carrying his bag.

JACK You old bloody fool.

CROWTHER reaches for his shotgun. Breaks it to check if it's loaded.

Now you're gonna shoot me blind, are you?

CROWTHER closes the gun. As he raises it to where JACK is standing, JACK slips silently away from him and makes for the door. He pauses and looks back at the old man aiming his gun into empty space. Shakes his head at his foolishness. CROWTHER listens intently. JACK turns to go – but as he does so his bag catches a chair. CROWTHER wheels round. And for a moment they face each other.

JACK He lifted the gun
 He fired the gun

Gunshot

CHOIR *And the dark rolled in like the tide
 And the dark rolled in like the tide
 And the dark rolled in like the tide...*

[LEAF appears and relieves CROWTHER of his gun.]

LEAF Tha's time, old friend. Tha's time to go.

[He leads CROWTHER off.]

SCENE 18

POPPY is peering out through LEAF's monocular. She has a canvas bag at her feet. SIR MORTON joins her. He has binoculars.

SIR MORTON Godwits.

POPPY How many, do you think?

SIR MORTON Hard to say. A few hundred. A thousand perhaps. People here will tell you in the old days there used to be many more.

POPPY That's hard to imagine.

SIR MORTON These old stories grow in the telling. And memories can be unreliable.

POPPY So we'll never know.

SIR MORTON Not unless someone counts them. Then comes back next year and does it again. And the year after that. In 20 years or so and you might learn what the population was doing.

POPPY How could you do it? Count them all? There's so many.

SIR MORTON Well, you couldn't count every bird. But you might count them in one small area, then multiply that area across the whole flock. That way you'd get a pretty good estimate.

The BOY has appeared and is hovering some way off.

Still no luck with my Dark Green?

POPPY What would you do if I found one?

SIR MORTON Oh, I'd see it was worth your while.

POPPY No, with the butterfly. What would you do with that?

SIR MORTON I'd add it to my collection.

You disapprove?

POPPY If she come all the way from France that seem wrong to pin her to a drawer bottom.

SIR MORTON But she might survive a hundred years in that drawer.
Surely that's something?

POPPY But that's not where she belong, is it?

SIR MORTON [*moving on*] You're starting to sound like Ben Crowther.

POPPY I don't mind that.

SIR MORTON One thing, Poppy. If you ever find a Queen of Spain and
let her go – don't tell me.

POPPY I won't.

EXIT SIR MORTON

[*to the BOY*]

Are you followin' me?

BOY No.

POPPY You were out on Church Farm Marsh.

BOY An what if I was?

POPPY It's nothin' to me.

She peers through the monocular at the birds.

MUSIC Eyes Across the Water. The BOY lingers.

I'm headin' back now.

[*indicating the bag*] You can bring that if you like.

BOY All right.

[*He picks it up.*]

POPPY Careful. Don't drop it.

MUSIC

SCENE 19

*CROWTHER and LEAF emerge from The Plover.
CROWTHER carries an eel bab, a cane about 4 feet long
with a worsted line and a bunch of worms on the end.
LEAF's bab has no stick, just a long coil of worsted.
CROWTHER is no longer blind.*

CROWTHER That blessed rain's done us a favour. Water'll be good
an' thick. That should bring the big 'uns up out of the
mud. Where to, d'you think?

LEAF Wilks alus' used to say you can't beat Calvers Drain for
a big eel.

CROWTHER An what do we say?

LEAF Water's runnin' a bit full for my likin'. I think we'd do
better up The Fleet.

CROWTHER The Fleet it is then.

*POPPY has appeared and is wandering the marsh, some
way off.*

LEAF Though Wilks knew his eels, I'll say that. There's no one
had a better arm with a pick.

CROWTHER Hullin' eel picks takes a good eye an' a strong arm. An'
it's hard work. I'll take this bab every time.

*[LEAF has stopped. He's struggling with his coil of
worsted which has become tangled.]*

You all right, 'bor?

[He hands CROWTHER one end of the worsted.]

LEAF Here. Take that over there.

[CROWTHER does as he's asked. LEAF unrolls his coil as he goes.]

CROWTHER You know what ol' Tom Brooks say is the best way to treat an eel?

LEAF I do.

CROWTHER Cut off his head. Skin it. Cut it in pieces no bigger than your thumb, boil them with a bit o' garlic –

LEAF - an' feed them to the cat.

CROWTHER - an' feed them to the cat.

CROWTHER He couldn't abide an eel, ol' Tom. Took them by the sackful. Couldn't abide the thought of 'em.

[LEAF's worsted now stretches right across the stage. CROWTHER looks at his own modest bab and stick.]

Are you babbin' from the bank or the Town Hall steps?

LEAF I do it the way my father did it.

CROWTHER He must ha' lost more eels than he landed.

LEAF That he did. An' I shall do the same.

Enter the BOY. He spies POPPY across the stage.

BOY Poppy! Over here! Tha's me!

He hurries towards her. LEAF and CROWTHER have to quickly raise their line so he doesn't crash into it.

I come early, like you said. What're we goin' to do?

POPPY We're goin' to count godwits.

BOY What, all of 'em?

POPPY Every last one. An' when we done that we're gonna' start on the plover.

BOY I don't know as my countin' goes up that far.

POPPY Then you'd better learn if you want to help.

BOY I can learn.

POPPY Good by the year's end we're goin' to know every bird that's been on Breydon.

BOY Is that all?

POPPY No. That's just the start.

As they make their way across to The Plover they pass directly in front of LEAF and CROWTHER. The men are invisible to the BOY. But as POPPY goes she pauses and glances back. She nods in acknowledgement to CROWTHER and LEAF. They nod in return.

Choir begins softly – Breydon Water

BOY What is it?

POPPY Somethin'. Nothin'. [*she smiles to herself*]

Weather's comin' in. We should get started...

SONG *The hard-fowl cry*

*The moon turns old
All Breydon waits*

*While from the East
A darkening sky
Brings down like falling snow
Watch it fall,
Soft snow, as if to lie
On Breydon Water
On Breydon Water*

*By Lockgate Mill
The eel-grass grows
By Breydon Water*

*A midnight chill
A cold wind blows
And Breydon waits*

*The winter geese
Are waiting still
While here, on Lockgate Drain
Falls the rain
Soft rain, falling still
On Breydon Water
On Breydon Water*