



THE QUARTER JACK'S CHRISTMAS CHALLENGE Allendale House, December 2012

I, Jack O'Clock, otherwise known as The Quarter Jack, have guarded this town of Wimborne Minster and marked every quarter of an hour for many hundreds of years. It is my custom from time to time to step down from my perch in the Tower to march about incognito.

On this day of December 2012, I have come here to Allendale House to issue a challenge to all those who have, over a thousand years, contributed significantly to the wellbeing and development of Wimborne. I shall assist each contestant to travel across time and place to stake their claim to be Wimborne Worthy of Worthies.

(Pause) Those gathered from the present, must then decide who should be adjudged the Worthiest. Oyez! Oyez! The Challenge is uttered! You may commence!

CHARACTERS in order of appearance

Ellie / Laura / Charlie (in audience)

Hilda Coles CLARE

Charles Castleman TONY

St Cuthburga TUPPY

Alicia Payntere JEAN

Alicia's Children ALFIE, MIA

Lady Margaret Beaufort KENLIS

Isaac Gulliver & Elizabeth Gulliver JEFF & BARBARA

Abraham Pike DAVE

Scurvy (Gullivers' Servant) FAYE

Mrs Henrietta Bankes MARION

Alice Maud Baker ELLYN

Viola Bankes ELLA

Nurse Stanley FAYE

LAURA / ELLIE / CHARLIE are seated at end of row, facing stage right. Long table covered by tablecloth. On the window shelf is a decanter with glasses and wine, all covered by large dust sheet / cloths.

Lights off – or very low. SFX: Mysterious soundscape plays. Clock TICKS loudly – Reading of Thomas Hardy's poem tale of Hours (RECORDED). Rattling of keys, old door creaking open. Cast are in position at entrances A, B, C.

From B, HILDA COLES, Founder of Priest's House Museum, enters, carrying / dragging big box of artefacts. (Soundscape continues). HILDA puts box down. Takes out lamp. Lights it. Looks around. Sound dips during HILDA's speech, then up again.

HILDA: First time open in 30 years! (*Laughs*) Like entering Tutankhamun's tomb!

She carefully removes the dustsheet over the table, which is covered in a nicer cloth, with dried Christmas decorations.

HILDA: Time to get to work, Hilda.

She removes smaller, lighter cloth from window sill where drinks are set. Blows off dust. She goes to her metal box and places in on the table. She stands behind as she unpacks and sets all the artefacts / props out carefully.

HILDA: The Wooden Cross? ... In the centre ... Healing Herbs right next to it. Illicit French lace ... and powder. ... here at the end. *(Stage left end of table)* The steam train next to it... A beautiful vellum book...up the other end ... there.. The keys to the ancient manor house...here. And there, I think, our special exhibition is in place. Ready for the guest...One last artefact...the Quarter Jack's Challenge! *(HILDA puts marbled script in place in the centre)*
And now....opening time!

She takes out bell and rings it. Then places it on the table. Finally she goes to sit at the side on a chair set out and watches. Or rings the bell. She gets out brush to gently dust off characters as they enter.

Bells ring. Soundscape continues.

From A, CHARLES CASTLEMAN enters. Looks at the table. He picks up the scroll on the table...reads aloud the Quarter Jack's speech. SFX echo. CHARLES puts down the document.

CHARLES: Good evening. I am Charles Castleman, lawyer, third son of William and Mary Castleman, former owners of Allendale House.

HILDA: I know. *(She crosses still in her curatorial role and removes invisible 'cobwebs' / dust from CASTLEMAN with a brush)*

CHARLES: You do? You are...?

HILDA COLES: *(referring to CASTLEMAN's attire)* That looks better. I'm Hilda Coles, daughter of Tom Coles. We kept The Ironmongers' Shop In The Square for some time.

CHARLES: Ah! But I don't recog...

HILDA: Not in your time. A little later.

HILDA: Your audience awaits ...

CHARLES: Ah! *(Pause)* Ladies and Gentlemen, I appear...unwittingly... to be your host tonight. You are welcome. While we wait for the remaining contenders, allow me to discourse briefly on Allendale House, constructed in 1823 for my father, to the designs of the eminent architect, Sir Jeffrey Wyatville, who later designed St. George's Chapel in Windsor.

A bell rings – Again with interesting sound effects.

CHARLES *(bowing)*: Madam, you are indeed a worthy contestant for the Quarter Jack's Challenge.

HILDA: Oh no, Mr Castleman. Others, far worthier, are crossing the threshold of time as we speak.

SFX: Crash of bells.

HILDA goes to open door for CUTHBURGA. CUTHBURGA enters, kneels and crosses herself.

CHARLES: You must be Let me guess...

HILDA (*reverential, softly*): Cuthburga, sister of King Ina (*pronounced EYE-NAH*) of Wessex.

CHARLES: After whom our Minster is named?

HILDA (*brushing off St Cuthburga's cobwebs*): The very same.

CUTHBURGA: Where shall I sit, sir?

CHARLES shows her to her chair. She places her cross / bible on the table. HILDA stays by door to receive visitors.

SFX again. From B, ALICIA enters. She and her 3 children, who look a bit overawed, move to upstage right of CHARLES. CHARLES is shocked as she is in rags.

CHARLES: There must be some mistake. If you are bringing something in from the workhouse in East Borough, you must go to the back door and wait for cook...

ALICIA (*stubborn & strong*): *I was invited ... (She sets her gift of herbs on the table. Stares at CHARLES and the posh house).*

CHARLES (*upstage right close to her*): We want no trouble here tonight, woman.

ALICIA (*continuing without listening to him*): By the Quarter Jack. He told me to come. I cured his ancestor once. Oh yes. (*Loud and arch, to audience*) Gout. Very smelly.

CHARLES: No, I am sorry, but....

CUTHBURGA: Let her stay.

CHARLES: But I cannot permit a lady such as yourself, a saint no less, to inhale the toxic...

CUTHBURGA (*ignoring him, speaking to ALICIA*): Sit down.

HILDA: It is true, Mr Castleman. She was invited. (*As she is brushing down the PAYNTERES*) The Quarter Jack beats time for rich and poor alike in Wimborne's story.

CUTHBURGA (*to Alicia*): Who are you, woman, and whence do you come?

ALICIA (*goes to sit next to CUTHBURGA at end of table stage right*): Alicia Payntere and family. Late of Cowgrove, 14th century healer. In the Moot Court Records of Cowgrove, they called me a Witch. But it was not my fault Ricardo Abbott preferred me to his own nag of a wife, was it?

CUTHBURGA: I never trust men. Least of all my brother, Ine. (To CASTLEMAN)
You may serve us drinks now.

CHARLES (*USL*): Of course (*He pours wine from decanter into goblets*)

SFX. Margaret Beaufort enters proudly. Takes a glass from Charles. Goes to speak to the other women.

From C, LADY MARGARET BEAUFORT enters.

LADY MARGARET: Lady Margaret Beaufort. 15th century, King Maker and Educator. Your health!

The others clink glasses. Noise off. From A & B, GULLIVER and MRS G come in, searching for each other. They meet as if for first time in many years, pleased to see each other. Then they converge to USL, Sit on stage left.

GULLIVER: We are ever so honoured to be invited!

MRS G: Amongst such illuminations, my dear!

GULLIVER: To think, I used to be a smugg ...

MRS G: Free Trader, my dearest.

GULLIVER: Yes, of course. Good evening all. I am Isaac Gulliver and this is my charming wife, Elizabeth. You can still find me inside the Minster, you know, ...

MRS G: ... where he was churchwarden in his latter years

GULLIVER: Just opposite the clock.

BOTH: Isaac Gulliver! Esquire!! No less.

GULLIVER: A little drink, my dear?

MRS G: Don't mind if I do, Mr G.

They hold up glasses for CHARLES to serve them. He does so.

ALL (*toast*): To Wimborne Minster!

From C, MRS HENRIETTA BANKES enters, followed by maid carrying her things, calling Castleman.

HENRIETTA: Castleman, Castleman! Where on earth are your servants? I had to see myself in!

CHARLES: I apologize, madam...er...you are?

HENRIETTA: Mrs Henrietta Bankes, of course, mistress of Kingston Lacy at the start of the 20th century, mother of Ralph Bankes, the future squire. *(To CHARLES again)* Your brother worked for Ralph's great uncle – William John, the collector!

CHARLES: Ah, yes! Of course. Welcome. Do be seated, Mrs. Bankes. *(She takes her place at end stage right of table.*

HILDA does more brushing down.

HILDA (to ALICE): You are welcome too, Alice.

ALICIA (to ALICE MAUD BAKER): And who are you, dearie?

ALICE: I...

HENRIETTA: My maidservant ... of no significance to Wimborne. Are we all here? If so, let us proceed with haste. I am a busy woman. *(Pause)* Well?

CHARLES: Of course! *(Looks at the Challenge again)* It appears we must each persuade our audience of our claim to immortality.

ALICIA: I was never immoral! Whatever they said!

CUTHBURGA pats ALICIA on shoulder to sympathize.

CHARLES *(embarrassed)*: But first we need to appoint judges from the audience. Do we have volunteers?

MARGARET: They should be young. In Education. *(Points at LAURA)*

ALL: YOU! *(They point at the three young people in audience)*

LAURA: Me!

ALL: Yes, you! And you there – and you! Stand up.

LAURA, ELLIE AND CHARLIE stand awkward and a bit embarrassed.

CHARLES: Names?

LAURA: Laura.

ELLIE: Ellie.

CHARLIE: Charlie.

CHARLES: Your occupations?

LAURA: I'm at school.

CHARLIE: Me too,

ELLIE: College.

MARGARET: Excellent.

CHARLES: Now, you must decide who should speak first by choosing one of the gifts.
Laura, you go first... (*ALL wave objects and vie for attention.*)

LAURA (*to CHARLIE*): What should I choose?

ALL (*in turn*): A scroll, the sacred cross, herbs, a train, Dutch lace, keys...

LAURA: This one. (*Picks up book*)

CHARLES: The book, Ladies and Gentlemen. (*To STUDENTS*) Judges, you may sit.

HILDA: I believe it belongs to Lady Margaret Beaufort.

CHARLES: She will speak first. Ladies and Gentlemen...Lady Margaret Beaufort!

Lady Margaret Beaufort comes forward.

MARGARET: Educare, educare, educare!

LAURA: Excuse me, what does that mean?

MARGARET: It means, Education, young lady! Surely you study Latin?

LAURA: Er, afraid not...Mathematics...Physics?

MARGARET (*surprised reaction before commencing address*): The greatest gift one can give is knowledge. I had one child, a son, born when I was 14 and *already a widow*. My husband was Edmund Tudor, son of Katherine, French widow of Good King Harry ...

ELLIE (*interrupting keenly*): Henry VIIIth?

MARGARET: Henry Vth (*change of tone*) But please do not interrupt again.

ELLIE: Sorry.

MARGARET (*carrying on regardless of ELLIE*): After I had achieved my lifetime's ambition and seen my son Henry become King of England and founder of the House of Tudor, I devoted myself to charitable deeds. I founded a chantry to pray for the souls of my beloved parents, John and Margaret Beaufort, Duke and Duchess of Somerset, now at peace in Wimborne Minster.

I survived four husbands (*others gasp in surprise*) and because I had no family to call on my fortune, I devoted myself and my wealth to founding places of learning. Lady Margaret Hall, a college for women in the University of Oxford, was named after me. And you will know of the one here in Wimborne, made even greater when my great granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth I, granted a Royal Charter to allow it to become known by her name: Queen Elizabeth's School. Imagine, by 1850, 50 boarding pupils were taught there and, in 1970, it moved to its present site. I believe it has now a new incarnation?

CHARLIE (*Noisy*): Yes! That's my school.

LAURA: QE School - I used to go there.

ELLIE: What it's like?

CHARLIE: Good. I like it.

MARGARET: Try and remember, children - The flesh is weak and turns to dust – but a thought well taught lives on.

3 STUDENTS: A thought well taught lives on.

Applause as LADY MARGARET BEAUFORT returns to her seat. Alice goes to help her to her seat.

CHARLES: Thank you, Lady Margaret. Time to choose again. Your turn, Charlie. (*To CONTESTANTS*) Hold up those gifts, please.

CHARLIE (*stands and leans*): Hmm ... The herbs?

CHARLES: Oh...those belong to...you...

ALICIA: Me. Alicia Payntere.

SFX. Alicia rises to speak, goes to front, centre stage in front of table.

ALICIA: What's the value of books for those of us who can't read?
(*General murmuring of interest*)

A piece of vellum's a fine thing to touch and sniff, so I've been told. But the truth is that all the remedies and recipes, rhymes and spells, puzzles and

potions that I've learned came from the mouths of cunning men and wise women, all of it remembered, down the ages, passed on with no need for writing down. *(Places hands on children's head)* And so I told my own sweet children so they would have the strength of knowing.

ALICIA picks up herbs from basket, gives some to each child, perhaps naming some.

ALICIA: It was a way to make a living of sorts. But we lived poorly in Cowgrove with a great quantity of herbs and a muddle of gourds and jars all over the house, and people did point and whisper. *(ALL contestants point at Alicia and begin whispering)* Because we were *different*, they made things up about me, which weren't true. *(ALICIA moves downstage left to imitate the gossips.)* 'That Alicia Payntere has put the evil eye on Agnesse Abbott's cows' said my neighbour, and his neighbour told his neighbour's neighbour. *(She moves more to left)* Which did build up - so half the village believed that Agnesse's cattle had had a spell put upon them. *(Moves back to kids)* But I know, and my children knows, that the poor beasts were sick with a bout of pox.

CHILDREN: That they were – every one of them.

Children agree, nodding heads.

ALICIA: You see, Lady Margaret, we had learning, but none could see it. So I was taken up before the Moot Court at Cowgrove and sentenced, *(ALL slam the table)* burnt *(ALL start clapping hands to create fire sound)* before my very own children who raged days and nights against their mother's unjust death.

Crescendo. ALL stand, still clapping over ALICIA.

Children scream. Silence. ALL sit.

ALICIA walks back slowly to place with children at table. Sniffs herbs. Breathes deeply. Calms down. Looks at audience.

ALICIA: But I am pleased to see how *today*, YOU people favour much more the great goodness the earth offers and some try to teach old ways of tuning into its mysteries. My gift to you would be a herb of your choice to place by your back door, and to know its uses and what it offers you. So! I have done. *(She sits)(Applause)*

LAURA & CHARLIE *(angry)*: That's....horrible. To be burned / just.....

ELLIE: How could they do it? So cruel ...

LAURA: ... just for trying to heal people!

CHARLIE: Not fair!

CHARLES: Quieten down, please. All of you. We must proceed. Our time here is short. *(Looks down)* Ellie! Your turn to choose the next challenger.

ELLIE (*still affected by what she's heard, she goes and looks on table. Picks up lace*):

This! It reminds me of a project on smugglers we did at school. I hope it is a happier story.

ISAAC & ELIZ (*standing up*): Oh yes it is indeed! At your service (*they bow*)

CHARLES: The Gullivers!

ELIZABETH: I remember that time in our younger days when I had you laid on the table.

(*ALL look shocked, giggling "Oooh". Isaac looks to the audience with a grin*)

ISAAC: You don't want to be talking like that, Elizabeth. We're fine, respectable folk. You keep our married life quiet.

ELIZABETH: Oh Isaac, that's not what I'm talking about. Just remembering that night when that over keen customs officer young Abram Pike came so close.

(*ALL giggle "Oooh". Isaac looks again to the audience shocked.*)

ISAAC: So close to what?

ELIZABETH: To finally catching you!

ISAAC: I got to give that young Gobloo credit. He never gave up easily but you and me had him outsmarted at every turn, lass.

ELIZABETH (*to the audience*): Now, here's a tale that will demonstrate to you good people of Wimborne what quick wit and daring can achieve.

ISAAC: You will surely realise why we should be your choice for the Worthiest of Worthies! (*Off into position stage right*)

SFX.

ELIZABETH (*storytelling, atmospherically*): It was a very cold night and the sky was clear and covered in stars...

(*ALL make wind noises NOISILY*)

It were windy but not *gale* force! Isaac had been out for some time waiting for his lugger the Dolphin to drop anchor off Branksome Chine.

SCURVY, *Servant, comes on carrying booty.*

ISAAC (*mimes, sitting on his hobby horse, watching and waiting*): Scurvy! Ho there, Scurvy!

Tell them to load those casks carefully into the wagons! We don't want any spillages of brandy tonight!

SCURVY: Yus, Mr G.

GULLIVER: What?

SCURVY (*correcting herself*): I mean, NO, Mr G.!

ISAAC: Here, bring me one of those casks. I'm going on ahead to see my lady wife.
(*SCURVY passes him cask*)
Look out for any trouble and I'll meet you at St Andrews in Kinson.

SCURVY Yes, Mr G. Mum's the word, eh?

GULLIVER waves, turns, rides off. Others make galloping sounds.

GULLIVER: I galloped over the gorse and heather, homeward bound to Elizabeth. As I reached the crossroads, I heard the sound of hooves and a cry rang out.

DAVE (*as PIKE, Customs Officer*): Stop in the King's name OR I'll shoot!

ISAAC: Ha, Ha! You'll have to catch me first, Gobbler! (*To Horse*) Come on, lass!
(*Gallops faster*)

ELIZABETH (*Racing commentary style*): That Gobbler, Abraham Pike, chased him over the heath, but Isaac gave him a good run for his money and arrived home minutes before him.

ISAAC (*dismounting, to SCURVY*): That was quick, Scurvy! You beat me!

SCURVY: Shanks' pony, Mr G. Always a good runner, me, Mr G. Did I tell you about that time I...?

ISAAC: Not now, Scurvy, just unsaddle the horse, and turn her loose in the paddock.

SCURVY: Yes, Mr G. Come on, Bessie – (*as BESSIE runs ahead of her*) Woah, easy does it.... (*Exits*)

GULLIVER: Bless! Only keep her on 'cos I feel sorry for her...Anyway, where was I?

SCURVY: At your house, Mr G! (*To audience as she exits*) Not as daft as he thinks, me!

GULLIVER: AH YES, (*Still carrying the cask, knocks on the door*) Elizabeth, open this door! Hurry woman!

ELIZABETH: Isaac, what's going on?

ISAAC: Don't just stand there. Revenue men coming. Get that trap door open.

Elizabeth pulls back carpet and opens door. Isaac leaves cask and crawls in under table.

ELIZABETH: Then there was a banging on the door such as you've never heard.

PIKE (*outside*): Open up in the King's name!

ELIZABETH sees cask and hides it under her skirts.

ELIZABETH: He was shouting and banging and raising the households throughout Kinson with his cussing.

PIKE (*off*): Open up in the King's name! I know you're in there. You smuggling swine.

SCURVY (*panics, frightened*): Oooh, what'll happen to us, madam? We're going to be hanged! Ohhh!

ELIZABETH (*to her maid*): Scurvy!

SCURVY: Yes, Mrs G?

ELIZABETH: Stay calm and let him in.

SCURVY: Very well, Mrs G.

ELIZABETH: Just a minute (*Arranges her skirt over cask*) All right, now!

SCURVY opens the door. PIKE enters and SCURVY screams and gibbers. PIKE snoops around, amongst audience first.

ELIZABETH: Why, sir, what an unaccustomed pleasure, to receive so distinguished a looking gentleman, on such a cold night.

PIKE: Where is he? Where've you hidden him?

ELIZABETH: Oh, my husband you've come to see, is it? Well sir, I'm afraid he's not at home.

PIKE: I'll *wait* for him then.

ELIZABETH: No sir, it would be wasting your time waiting for him for I know his business will detain him at least until the morrow.

PIKE: Right! I'm going to tear this place apart this place 'til I...

ELIZABETH: Search my house! Oh sir, you do not presume that I am some slip of a girl who knows no better than to allow you in without a warrant from the magistrate! Now off with you, young sir. It is not seemly to be visiting respectable married ladies at this hour without the master of the house present. Is it, Scurvy?

SCURVY: Yes, Mrs G (*ELIZABETH frowns at her*) I mean, No, Mrs G.

PIKE leaves, snarling.

PIKE: I'LL BE BACK! (*Exits*)

ELIZABETH: Has he gone?

SCURVY (*checks door*): Yes, Mrs G. He's legged it. His horse is galloping away

SFX: coconuts. Isaac peeps out from under the table.

ISAAC: My brave and smart girl. (*They embrace*) But now he's found his way here, the rogue will be back. Of that I'm sure. (*ALL Freeze*)

ELIZABETH: And the very next day, with his document clutched in his hand, he was back, banging on the door and shouting.

PIKE (*banging on door*): Open up in the King's name! I demand entry to search this property. I have a magistrate's warrant! (*LOUD*) Open up I tell you.

ELIZABETH: Isaac, come here and lay down!

ALL show shocked reaction.

ISAAC: Elizabeth, my dear, this is hardly a good time for ...

ELIZABETH: Isaac, shut up and do exactly as I say. (*He lies down*) Pass me that box of contraband wig powder.

Lie as still as a corpse, for my dear, that is exactly what you must be. I am mourning your sudden demise of the plague.

ISAAC: The plague!

Helped by SCURVY, she liberally applies the powder to his face and hands, crosses his arms. St Cuthburga places her cross on his chest. ELIZABETH rehearses her look of grief. Isaac coughs and splutters, then lies perfectly still.

ELIZABETH: Now, Scurvy, open the door and let the gentleman in.

SCURVY: Yes, Mrs G! (*SCURVY opens door*).

ELIZABETH: Cry!

SCURVY *wails, melodramatically*.

ELIZABETH: And the rest of you! (*ALL start crying*) Oh sir, little did I think when you last saw me that our next meeting would be such a sorrowful one. Sir, you intrude on our grief. Yes, you may see my husband but you will hear not a word from him. For he is dead! Felled by the merciless hand of the plague! My own dear husband. His cheeks so pale, life-blood drained. His warmth and vigour all gone!

PIKE comes close.

ELIZABETH: See for yourself, sir, his cold, stiff plague-ridden corpse! (*GULLIVER turns head and grimaces. PIKE leaps back towards door*) What, you do not wish to approach further? You must depart so soon? Then, leave us quickly for soon they will take his body from me! (*Breaks down completely*)

PIKE: Curses! Gulliver! You got the better of me in the end! Damn you! (*Exits*)

Pause.

ELIZABETH (*to SCURVY*): Has he gone?

SCURVY (*checking*): Yes, Mrs G. Legged it.

GULLIVER (*sits up quickly and laughs*): Oh, you're such a quick-witted beauty, Elizabeth!

They embrace.

SCURVY: What about me, then?

ISAAC (*reaction to SCURVY*): My burial took place with a coffin filled with stones and I left Kinson for a few months to let matters settle.

MARGARET (*shocked*): I fail to see how such illicit acts constitute worthy behaviour!

ISAAC: You may wonder what's noble about such exploits – well our business provided hundreds of stately folks with their high quality wines and brandies, gin and silk, tea and lace at very reasonable prices. *And we made people's lives a little happier!*

ELIZABETH: And never once did Isaac or his brave men resort to violence to further our trade.

ISAAC: So, Wimborne, (*Holds up bottle of brandy*) with this you may drink to our gift of gentlemanly conduct, quick wit and enterprise. Thank you. (*They bow and move back to their seats. Others clap*).

ISAAC: Did I tell you that I became churchwarden of the Minster? And an "esquire", and was buried in the Minster?

ELIZABETH: Yes, yes and as usual, my contribution to your success gets ignored – but that's another story.

Pause.

CHARLES: What do you think, Henry?

HENRY: Well it was a good adventure story, but...

CHARLES: But?

ELLIE: I think Lady Margaret has a point – a bit dodgy – no offence, but in terms of being chosen as Wimborne Worthy of Worthies...

CHARLES: You will decide that in due course. (*To Charlie*) Charlie, you choose the next speaker – find a gift.

HUGO (*stands and peers*): Now let me see. The train!

CHARLES: Ah! My turn then. (*To other WORTHIES*) This was my contribution to the town. I was on the Board of the South Western Shareholders. It took us ten years. And it was in this very room that we finally heard we had triumphed.

CASTLEMAN stands and comes to front.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure today to open the westward line. The railway has arrived in Wimborne at last! The future is steam! We have overcome all the obstacles, convinced those who poured scorn, those who cast doubt... Those who resisted change... now they will see we were right! And our defeated rivals, the Great Western Company, must concede that the best team won in the end! Let us express our gratitude for the genius of our friend, Captain Moorson, the finest engineer in the land. This day will go down in the annals of Wimborne's history... no longer a sleepy country town, but an artery beating fast with the blood of progress, heading westwards!! Look around you - all are here.... the landed gentry, the businessmen - all united in this endeavour....!

New machines and fertilizers for the farmers, new products for our shops. Profits and Progress! Speed and Success! Remember, my friends - only four hours to London! London to Winchester! Winchester to Southampton!! Southampton to West Moors! West Moors to Wimborne! We are all here to gain ... by the train!

ALL (repeat last line): Gain by the train!

HENRIETTA: An innovation and a vital service to the town, Mr Castleman. My family and I used it often when we travelled up to London to our town house.

LAURA: But it didn't stay forever, did it, the railway? It's a row of houses now.

CHARLES: So I was informed. For which reason, I am surprised to be amongst such worthy contenders.

LAURA: But they've kept part of it – it's a track - you can cycle all along it to Poole. The Castleman Trailway.

ELLIE: I've done it with my dad. So it sort of still helps us now.

CHARLES: Thank you. You must choose again, Laura.

LAURA: OK, I'm going for the keys!

CHARLIE: Whose are they?

HENRIETTA: They are mine. Come, Alice.

CHARLES: Mrs Bankes of Kingston Lacy.

MRS BANKES comes forward and takes the keys from LAURA. She holds them up proudly.

HENRIETTA: These keys represent duty. For they are the keys to the estate of Kingston Lacy. Built by my family, for generations we gave employment to the people of Wimborne. Stability and prosperity, we've brought. At times, it was a struggle but I never shirked my duty. I was a widow for many years, with only my children Ralph, Daphne and Viola ...

ALICE: Oh, dear Miss Viola ...

HENRIETTA: Quiet, Alice. ...with only them for comfort and company. But I carried out my husband's wishes and managed the estate diligently. When Ralph, my beloved son, came of age, how proud I was to hand over the estate to him. And he gave you the finest gift of all – the land for you to enjoy. (*Applause*) I haven't finished... A beautiful park to walk in (for a very modest charge), bluebell woods and gardens, the church of St Stephen's. And the house itself and all its treasures – paintings by Velasquez, Rubens and Van Dyck. One of the finest art collections in England! Wouldn't you agree, Mr Castleman?

CASTLEMAN: Quite so, Madam.

HENRIETTA: Gifts for the whole town. Duty - the key to civilisation.

ISAAC: I never pay no duty.

ELIZABETH: Ssh, Isaac

HENRIETTA: Oh, it would serve you well. Thank you, Ladies and Gentlemen. *(Applause)*
Come, Alice. *(They start to return to seat)*

LAURA: Wait a minute ... *(MRS BANKES & Alice freeze)* What about her servant?
She hasn't said anything yet.

CHARLIE: No, that's right.

ELLIE: Doesn't seem to get a word in edgeways.

ALICE *(flustered)*: Oh, please forgive me but I haven't much of a story to tell.

LAURA and others urge her to tell her story.

ALICE: And I've not brought a gift.

ELLIE: That doesn't matter. We still want to hear your story.

MRS BANKES sighs impatiently but returns to her seat.

ALICE *(stepping forward)*: Well if it please you, Ma'am. I entered service as a nursery
maid to the dear young ladies, Miss Daphne and Miss Viola. I was particularly
fond of Miss Viola. I used to call her "Cissie", I don't know why. And don't
think I am impertinent when I say this, but I do believe Miss Viola was fond of
me, because on my birthday, which was just any other day to everyone else,
she came specially to see me...

Pause. VIOLA enters and gives her a box.

VIOLA: For you, Alice. *(Pause. ALICE is amazed)* It is your birthday, isn't it?

ALICE: Yes, Miss Viola.

VIOLA: Happy Birthday then, Alice! *(She kisses ALICE, who blushes)*

ALICE: Thank you, Miss Viola! *(VIOLA kneels in front of ALICE looking ahead)*
Oh, I will treasure this box, Miss, and I will always keep it safe ... *(Freeze. To
audience again)* It was hard being a nursery maid. My favourite part of the

day was just before I put the children to bed. I loved brushing Miss Viola's hair. *(Starts brushing VIOLA's hair)*

VIOLA: I hate my hair! It's ... like wire...

ALICE: Oh, no, Miss Viola. No. It's lovely. *(Sing slowly and softly as she brushes: a nursery rhyme – perhaps Humpty Dumpty, as it has a bad outcome! VIOLA joins in canon after ALICE sings first phrase. They laugh)*

(To audience) To me, it was the most beautiful hair in the world. A mass of chestnut brown, cascading down her back, with golden curly ends.

VIOLA: Only you shall ever, ever brush my hair, Alice. Because you have the softest, gentlest hands. *(Suddenly ALL bang on table. ALICE doubles up in pain)*
What is it, Alice? You must tell me! Alice!

Freeze.

ALICE: But I couldn't tell dear Miss Viola. *(ALICE slowly moves away from VIOLA. Speaks aside to audience)* Such stomach pains. So suddenly. Something was very wrong, All night, the pain, and next morning bending over the fire grates to blacken them, it took twice as long.

FAYE re-enters dressed as nursery nurse, NURSE STANLEY, and takes VIOLA away across the stage and out. She turns and glares at ALICE. Freezes.

Nurse Stanley scolded me for coming late to the nursery. I tried to explain how much my stomach hurt. *(Pause)* To punish me, she wouldn't let me see the children. And I never saw Miss Viola again.

NURSE STANLEY leads VIOLA away.

VIOLA *(upset, calling back, as she is led away)*: Alice! Alice!

ALICE *(very simply but strongly)*: I died shortly afterwards - from 'undiagnosed appendicitis'.

ALICIA *tuts, and puts her arm around ALICE. CUTHBURGA mutters a prayer.*

SFX: *time passing again.*

Alice: The gift I will give to you for the future is - dedication. Not only to your work but more importantly to each other. As I dedicated my life to Miss Viola.

ALICE gives LAURA trinket box and returns to stand at Stage Right

LAURA goes and places the trinket box on table with others. She finds the Valentine's Cards.

LAURA: I think it's my turn to choose now. Valentine's Cards! Whose are these?

HILDA: They are *my* gift to the town – They once belonged to John Low, a stationer who let some of the rooms in our ironmongery. When he closed the business in 1872, he declared that the shop was to be boarded up and remain untouched until his death. When he died thirty years later, my father unlocked the room and found these Valentine's Cards. He chose them for the future museum. There are over 350 of them.

ELLIE: I remember seeing them on a school trip – aren't they supposed to be one of the largest collections around?

HILDA: One expert said they were of national importance. (*Change of tone*) I brought them tonight because, as we have just heard from poor Alice, *love* takes many forms. Education also stems from love, Lady Margaret, and, of course, God is love, as Cuthburga attests. She must surely have the final word tonight.

Cuthburga (*Stands. To ALICE*): Take comfort, child, for the meek shall inherit the earth.

(*Sung*) I am Cuthburga
Founder of this Minster church.

Mrs Bankes and you, Alice Maud Baker, I share with both of you that sense of duty and dedication, which shaped my life. And Lady Margaret shares with me a love of education and of learning.

(*Sung*) From this place
The great Leoba went to Frankish lands
To spread the word of God
These many different people and countless others
Throughout all generations
Have made this town the special place it is.
For we are all important,
Those that came before
And those who will come after.

This has been a holy site for more than one thousand years. May it please God to keep it so for many years to come. This is my gift to you.

(*Sung*) May he grant us peace
Dona nobis pacem
Dona nobis pacem
Amen

ALL: Amen

CHARLES: So, Laura, Charlie and Ellie, you have now heard all the challenges. Now it is time for you to speak. Time for you to decide whose gift should be chosen and carried across the divide.

ELLIE: To chose one over the other?

LAURA: To carry across the divide.

CHARLIE: Which one shall we choose?

LAURA: They were all important. *(To CHARLES)* Can weask the audience?

CHARLES: Yes, of course. We will be interested to hear what they think. Give them a minute or talk to their neighbours before they speak aloud and perhaps ask us questions.

Audience talk together for a minute. Young People facilitate next part. Audience give views and maybe ask questions. After a minute is up:

CHARLES: We are ready to hear from the audience now, Laura.

LAURA: Who would like to say whom they think is the most worthy of all? And why?

After a while, CHARLES will say time is now up and they must decide.

ELLIE: I know! I've got it! There's this great big space in the square in the centre of Wimborne – everyone is saying it needs something to fill it! So why not build a statue, a statue of all these lot – who have done so much for Wimborne? They're all the winners!

LAURA: YES!! And the statue will look like

(CHARLIE goes and waves arms about) This!!

SFX again as at start.

LAURA rings the bell as ALL slowly transform themselves into a large group statue.

Statue Breaks to Bow

The End