

WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE



BY HOOK OR BY CROOK:

A PLAY IN A WOOD

2004

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SCENE 1 DEBATE AT THE FAIR

Music as audience assembles. Commoners emerge from forest to face audience.

Horserider: These paths need upgrading– or they'll be lost forever.

Commoner 1: You won't be able to go riding there if there isn't a bridleway.

Horserider: There's some who think the horses should only be allowed to go round the outside of the forest - not stirring up the mud . . . People in cars don't understand people on horses.

Commoner 2: You get people who've only been here a few years who don't want horses going up and down their gravel.

Horserider: It's not horses that do the damage, it's the cars.

Music. All move. Freeze in new positions.

Older Person 1: New people don't like things that crow and cattle that blare.

Older Person 2: All the little farms have disappeared. And the milk lorry that came through with the churns – all gone.

Music. All move. Freeze in new positions.

Young Person 1: My granny told me once people came from all over to Broad Lawn for a day out. They'd put swings in the trees; throw handfuls of sweets on the grass for the children to scramble for. And the lady in the cottage over there used to boil up the copper for tea.

Newcomer: That sounds painful! *(All laugh)*

Older Person 1: She means the copper kettle.

Young Person 2: My auntie told me once that the woods and heather were home for gypsies – she knew the midwife who helped them give birth right here - in the cool shade.

Music. All move. Freeze in new positions.

Older Person 2: And it's got darker with all the holly – overgrown and more mysterious.

Young Person 2: People get lost in woods. And never found.

Young Person 1: A foreign student once spent all night in the forest, after her horse bolted. She couldn't find her way out.

Older Person 1: The Babe in the Wood! She was found safe and sound in the morning. Covered with leaves for warmth.

Music & singing as all move. Song: Lost in a Wood

Young Person 1: Most people at school don't even know it's here.

Horse Rider: We don't want Holt Forest to be like the New Forest. The public are destroying it – everyone wants to go there.

Commoner 1: But here it smells - of something dead. When I used to ride a few years back, I'd put a sprig of honeysuckle in my collar to overcome the smell. You don't get much birdsong now.

Newcomer: But just last year we saw birds galore – partridges, thrushes, woodpeckers, finches, tits.

Music. All move. Freeze in new positions.

Older Person 2: We had the right to pick up fuel once. A tree comes down and you went in and cleared it. Which keeps the forest tidy.

Horserider: If a tree comes down across a bridleway now, it means you're stuck.

Older Person 2 (to Younger Person): I wish you could have seen the forest how it was with lovely sunny glades. . .

Older Person 1: 50 years too late for that.

Older Person 2: ...bluebells and harebells, and cattle grazing – like at Pipe Maker's lawn where they dug out the clay to make pipes.

Music. All move. Freeze in new positions.

Horse Rider (moving to inspect front): If you start cattle grazing again you've got to keep them in somehow. You only have to have a scare like Foot and Mouth and then there's a real problem.

Newcomer: Cattle grids and cars and cattle wondering onto the road – it won't work. You have to think of the people in the cars. Fencing's the only answer!

Elder 1: Now what about this new management plan of English Nature. . .

All turn backs except Commoners 1 & 2.

Commoner 1: People expect their common rights – which some people know nothing about. Remember? (*Gets out notebook, reads*) "Bournemouth Town Hall April 1973. – report by Mr Settle, the commissioner.."

Commoner 2 (*impersonating Mr Settle*): "I have a strong objection to giving anyone rights over another man's land."

The man being Ralph Bankes of Kingston Lacy.

Commoner 1: Mr Settle thought there weren't any common lands over which common rights could exist in this day and age around Bournemouth.

Commoner 2: But us commoners proved him wrong. And what made him learn the error of his ways? It was coming here, seeing for himself. Then he changed his tune – said he could feel how little the place had changed from time immemorial.

Commoner 1: That's the heart of it. Our memorials...

All turn back to speak in unison.

All: ... these common lands of Holt.

Song: Enter a Wood

Enter a wood of oaks and beeches,
The mystery surrounds you.
Walk in a wood of ash and hazel
In the evening breeze.
And the willow seeds drift like cobwebs
Spun by the holly leaves.

Lost in a wood of oaks and beeches
The darkness surrounds you.
Whisper of secrets
Locked in the ghosts of long dead trees,
And the willow seeds drift like cobwebs
Spun by the holly leaves.

The echoing axe,
The crack of a branch,
The rustle of Autumn leaves
The fool sees not the same tree
That the Wise Man sees.
And the willow seeds drift like cobwebs
Spun by the holly leaves.

It takes only minutes to fell a tree,
And a lifetime to grow one.

Audience is led from the Green to the side of the pond to watch Puppet Show.



SCENE 2 AFTER THE PUPPET SHOW

School children are seated at front of audience. The Booker sisters are on either side of the puppet show.

Susanne Booker (*leading applause*): Wasn't that lovely? Let us show our appreciation of the puppet show, children?

Children applaud.

Nellie (*to children almost at once*): That will suffice!

Susanne: Turn around, children.
(*to audience*) I am Miss Booker. Miss Susanne Booker, headmistress of Gaunts School, Holt Parish. I teach Standards 4, 5 & 6. I believe we are a happy school. I favour a Christian approach to discipline. Authority tempered by understanding. I rarely use the cane.

Nellie: I am Miss Booker. Miss Nellie Booker, sister to Susanne. I teach Standards 2 and 3. I teach all the children singing. I also believe in a Christian approach to discipline. But the country children here will sometimes only respond, alas, to a firm hand.

Ben (*whispering*): She gave me a right clip round the ear-'ole last Friday!

Nellie (*to Ben*): Quiet!

Susanne: Ladies and gentlemen, today is a rather special day. As part of our fair on Broad Lawn, we shall all be going on a Family Nature Study Walk in the Forest. Isn't that exciting?

Children: Yes!

Nellie: No need to overdo it. We don't want tears before bed-time.

Susanne: I shall be pointing out a wide variety of fauna and flora in the forest. If you go ever so quietly, you may...

Nellie (*interrupting*): You WILL go very quietly!

Children: YES, MISS BOOKER.

Susanne: ...you may glimpse one of God's wild creatures. Of course, once the forest would have resounded with the howling of wolves and bears. . .

- Maria (*Kathryn*): Really, Miss Booker?
- Susanne: Yes, Maria?
- Nellie: Don't interrupt, ... (*name of child*)
- Susanne: But these days the woods are a much gentler place - apart from the beautiful oak and beech trees, capreolus capreolus, the roe deer. Or, if you are very very lucky, meles meles...
- Child: What's that?
- Susanne: ...meles meles, our dear friend Brock the Badger. Then of course, there is all the history...
- Nellie (*under her breath*): Miss Booker
- Susanne: Oh, yes, thank you, Miss Booker.
- Nellie (*looking at fob watch*): We don't want it to grow dark before we return, Miss Booker.
- Susanne: No, of course, you're quite right, Miss Booker. We must commence. Right, then everybody, let us all line up with our partners.
- Nellie: Remember, no talking while we are walking. And stay on the path at all times. Understood?
- Children: Yes, Miss Booker.
- Nellie (*to audience*): Understood? Follow on. (*blows whistle*)

Teachers and schoolchildren lead the audience along the path into the wood to the first oak tree over the bridge.

SFX of wolves and bears and voices of the wood.

Musicians and singers on the bridge.

Song: Forest Boundaries

Names are the palings of the forest
As all morning we walk
Sounding their syllables in the shade of oaks
Horton Crosse to Newman Lane
By the coppice to Dowager's Ford
Over Ameysford at Uddens Water
Thence to Clayford and upstream
Upstream to Pilforde Lane.

Onto Long Lanes and the corner of Merriefield
Then a sharp turn north west down the lane
Devydeth Mister Gouven's ground
And Dogdean into Girrendge Lane.

Hogmans Hill, Red Cross and Hell Corner at Chalbury
By the two oaks les deus soeurs
By the King's highway to Manytone
From thence to la Riggway to Uddinge
From thence to Wodekesworth
From thence to Horton
Through the middle of the village
Back to, back to the two oaks.



SCENE 3 UNDER THE OAK TREE

Nellie and Susanne bring the audience up to the tree. Ad lib managing a class.

Susanne: Hurry along, spread out please, everyone. You may be seated, children.

Children sit.

Nellie: Hush the chattering now. Thank you. *(Blows whistle)*

Susanne: Now time for some history. Apart from all the fauna and flora, let us now reflect upon all those men...

Nellie: And women, Miss Booker.

Susanne: Yes, of course, Miss Booker - and women, who have entered these woods before us. The commoners - from time immemorial, gathering wood for their fires by hook or by crook. Does anyone know what that expression means? Yes, Maria?

Maria *(Kathryn, standing)*: Does it mean picking up the wood with a billhook or a shepherd's crook, Miss Booker?

Susanne: Yes, dear. Well done. They were allowed to take only what they could gather with a billhook or a shepherd's crook. You have won a house point, dear. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, this forest has been privy to...

Children giggle.

Nellie: No, foolish child, not that sort of privy.

Susanne: As I was saying, Holt Forest has...

Jenny: Excuse me, Miss Booker. I need the privy.

Nellie: You should have gone back at school before we set out.

Jenny: Didn't want to go then, Miss.

Nellie: Behind that TREE - hurry, child!

Jenny rushes behind bush.

Nellie: Proceed, Miss Booker!

Susanne: Where was I?

Children: The privy, Miss Booker!

Suzanne: Oh yes, the forest has been privy..

Children giggle. Nellie glares at them. They stop.

Suzanne: er... party to some fascinating history. The famous Elizabethan Commission of 1598, for example, which rectified the absent Keeper's poor husbandry and secured commoners continuing rights....

Jenny comes back from behind bush.

Nellie: And not 100 years later the notorious Protestant Duke of Monmouth himself, erstwhile pretender to the throne of England, fled here from Somerset, after his defeat by the King's soldiers at Sedgemoor. Doubtless none of you country children knew that!

Molly: Oh yes, Miss Booker. My grampy told me that story.

Imogen: Yes, Miss, and he said you can still hear their voices, Miss, trapped in the forest like ghosts.

Susanne: As our dear father used to say.

Nellie (*blows whistle*): Time to move on, Miss Booker. (*to children*) Stand, children! (*to audience*) This way, keep to the path.

Susanne: I've got something very special to show you all next.

Audience follows to the clearing by the twisted tree.



SCENE 4
BY THE MAGIC TREE WITH EYES

Children standing in 2 groups on either side of dividing 'trunk'.

Nellie (*blows whistle*): Pay attention!

Susanne: Now do look at this fine specimen, everyone. Quercus robur - don't you just love Latin? So...robust and safe.

Nellie: A bulwark against the marauding Barbarian hordes.

Susanne: As our dear late father used to say. Have I told you our father was a rather eminent scientist?

Children: YES, MISS BOOKER.

Nellie: Many times.

Susanne: Well, when I was a girl, many moons ago, our father would take us walking every week-end, 'Sunday constitutional', as he called it. I remember as if it was yesterday. He'd say, 'Right, troops' - that was his little foible, you understand...

Nellie (*interrupting*): Miss Booker. It's time to fetch the picnic.

Children cheer.

Susanne: Oh yes. Well, we've all done jolly well, so we'll have a little rest here - you may all sit.

Children sit.

Susanne (*spotting Emily and Gertie rushing through wood*): Ah look! There are Emily and Gertie! Have you seen Miss Percival and the picnic, girls?

Gertie: No, Miss Booker.

Emily: We searched everywhere!

Susanne: Oh, dear. Miss Booker and I shall just go and find her. Where did we say we'd meet her, Miss Booker?

Nellie: Up on the main road, just up here. *(to children)* Don't leave this spot. We shall be back in precisely five minutes. Miss Booker?

Little Jack: What if we see a wolf?

Rebecca: Or a spooky witch?

Nellie: Why don't you listen? Miss Booker told you clearly - there are no bears, or wolves or witches living in Holt Forest anymore! *(to elder girls)* Gertie and Emily - you are in charge.

Susanne and Nellie exit up towards road.

Music as Letty runs off up the path to see if they've gone.

Gertie *(to James)*: Have they gone?

Letty *(looking up path)*: Yes.

Children: HURRAY!

Gertie & Emily: Shhh! We don't want them to hear you.

Emily: Let's play a game!

Children: HURRAY!

Emily: Right then - in two teams! *(points to left hand side group)* I'll go with this group!

Gertie *(points to other children)*: And I'll go with this one! What shall we play?

Alice/ Claire *(leaping up)*: Grandmother's footsteps!

Molly: Hide and seek!

Gertie: No, no! *(she looks at oak tree)* Let's play the Spooky Stories of Holt Forest Game!

Children: Yes, yes, let's!

Emily: So who's going to start?

Gertie: Our group! You can all watch! Come on, everyone get ready!

Group 1 hurry to find their places. The Travellers (Letty, Jack, Tate & Martha) go up path north, the others to south.

Gertie: Well, long ago, long before we were born, they do say there was a pair of wizened, wrinkled and wicked witches living in this old forest!

Alice *(sitting watching)*: Yes - Miss Booker and Miss Booker!

Children laugh.

Gertie: Don't interrupt!

Alice: Sorry!

Gertie: Anyway, one of the wicked witches, whose name was Wilhelmina, arrived one day at this very spot!

Cat: With her magic cat Pat!!

Music as Wilhelmina - Victoria - & Cat enter in a witchlike way. She scratches herself on bush and grumbles 'Ouch!'.

Wilhelmina: Oh, crooked kettles and sour curds and whey! Puss! It's no fun being a witch and having to live in scratchy bushes! My sister has a beautiful castle. It's not fair! *(calls off)* Obadiah! Obadiah! Oh, where is that pesky servant?

Ben *(running on as Servant)*: Yes, Mistress?

Wilhelmina: Build me a house! A fine house. Here! Now!

Ben: Yes, Mistress!

Music as he gathers sticks and twigs.

Wilhelmina: TOO SLOW TOO SLOW! Go and find some more people to help!

Servants *(look at each other)*: Where from, Mistress?

Wilhelmina *(mystically, she waves hands about to each side - left, centre, right)*: I see ... I see...
(Cat nudges her and points out Travellers) I see travellers! Coming this way!

Gertie: As luck would have it, just then a group of travellers appeared coming down the path!

Tate *(as dog)*: With their faithful dog! Woof! Woof!

Cat: Miaouw!

Travellers *(& Emily, singing loudly but tired and not too slow)*:
We're just a group of weary travellers
Travelling through the woods
We're lost, we're tired, we're hungry
We are desperate for some food!

Stop and face audience. They repeat song.

Gertie: The witch had a bright idea!

Wilhelmina: Hello, travellers! Welcome to Holt Forest! I couldn't help overhearing you saying you were a little....hungry?

Travellers: Oh yes, yes, yes! We're very hungry...

Travellers start to sing verse again. Dog howls.

Wilhelmina: No need to wear yourselves out singing again. Now if you do a little work for me – I promise to reward you handsomely.... *(mimes the following)* with plump haunches of roasted venison, barrels of best yeasty beer, mountains of rich rabbit pie...

Ben: But you haven't got any food like that!

Wilhelmina *(to servants)*: QUIET. YOU IDIOT! I'm a very powerful witch! I can do anything!

Ben: Except build a house!

Wilhelmina *(casting a sort of spell on them)*: Just imagine all that gorgeous grub going gooily down your greedy gullets!! Taste the mincey-wincey morsels of meat in your chomping choppy-wops *(to Dog)* And the juicy-woosey bones...

Travellers say ' Yum, Yum' and lick lips, almost hypnotised. Dog howls.

Travellers *(loudly)*: Stop! Stop! We'll do it! *(All freeze)*

Martha: So the travellers got to work building Wilhelmina a house!

Music. Cutting and sawing. Gertie persuades other group to stand and make the witch a house under the arch.

Gertie: Soon they had cleared many trees and built the Witch the most beautiful house!

Travellers: It's ready, Wilhelmina!

Wilhelmina: It's wonderful! My dream house! Oh thank you!

Letty & Martha: So, then where's our food?

Jack: And our beer?

Dog: Where's my bone?

Wilhelmina: Oh of course, now where did I leave it all? *(Cat gives her magic wand)*
Oh yes!

Music as Wilhelmina waves wand about.

Wilhelmina: By all the dark magic of this ancient forest.... make them run, make them flee! Turn these travellers into trees!

Travellers: She's tricked us. Run for it, everyone! *(They run off behind scene)*

Music. The Travellers turn into trees. Freeze.

Gertie: Well, just when the Wicked Witch was about to enter her new house, there was a terrible crash of thunder!

Music. All children make thunder sounds. Cat is scared. The other witch, Chloe, arrives on her Broom Stick, Claire.

Martha: The Greedy Witch's even greedier sister, Walpurga, arrived on her magic broomstick!

Walpurga: Down, stick! So what is this, eh? A new house, sister?

Wilhelmina: Maybe. What's it to you?

Walpurga: I want it!

Wilhelmina: You've already got a house!

Walpurga: Not like this one!

Wilhelmina: TOO BAD!

Ben: Off they go again - always arguing!

Both witches: Quiet, Obadiah! Who asked your opinion? (*Wave arms*)
Gimby, gumbly, lots of groans, turn silly servants into stones!

Music. The servants turn groaning into stones.

Walpurga: So - are you going to give me your house?

Wilhelmina: No!

Walpurga: RIGHT THEN! I'LL JUST HAVE TO TEACH YOU A LESSON! (*to her broom*) Get her, Brunhilde!!

Wilhelmina (*to her Cat*): After her, Hecuba!

Music as they fight - the Travellers and servants cheer on whoever they want. Sudden Drum Crash. All freeze.

Wilhelmina & Walpurga: Oh no! What's happening? We...are...turning into....trees!

They mime turning into trees – the witches go behind the big tree.

Gertie: And if you look closely into this old oak tree - you can still see the wicked witch's face!

Molly & Yolanda (*watching*): Really?

Alice: Looks just like Miss Nellie Booker!

Ella: So, what happened to the wonderful house that the poor travellers built?

Gertie: Over the years it tumbled down and was lost in the forest floor. (*ALL fall down*) But every summer, the same night on which the two witches fought - and turned each other into the tree - they say, you can see the wonderful house again - and hear the song of those poor weary

travellers!

Music. Travellers - now moving trees - sing their song spookily.

Travellers (*singing*): We're just a group of weary travellers
Travelling through the woods
We're lost, we're tired, we're hungry
We are desperate for some food!

Yolanda: Look at the tree. It's just like a witch's face!

Rebecca: That was a good story!

Little Jack: Holt Forest must be full of ghosts.

Music. All stand and dance about as they sing the song 'Dark in the Wood'.

Look for a witch or a bear.
If you meet one in the woods
It will give you quite a scare.

Down, dark, deep!
Down, dark, deep!

Down in the woods, dark in the woods, deep in the woods
Where the creatures creep.
Down in the woods, dark in the woods, deep in the woods
Where the spiders sleep.
And the bees in the trees,
Buzzing in the breeze,
Buzzing in the rustling leaves!

Down, dark, deep!
Down, dark, deep!

Emily: Ssssh! (*All look at her*) The forest is full of magic, yes. But not the magic of horrid old greedy witches. It's Nature's magic, our Grampy says. Green Magic. Look around you. Listen. (*Pause*) It's time for our story now. A story Grampy told Jenny, Susie and me about this very tree, when we were out gathering mushrooms with him last autumn. Do you want to hear it?

Children: Yes please.

Music. Children in Group 2 hurry off and hide behind the tree; Imogen, Emma & Francesca find somewhere else.

Emily: Ready everyone. Well now, you may not have known this, but this is probably one of the oldest and wisest trees in the wood.

Jack or Ben: How can a tree be wise?

Emily: If you listen you'll find out, Fred Bratley. You see, once upon a time, long, long ago, wondrous and magical creatures from the other world

came to Holt, because it was so beautiful. They decided to live inside this very tree. On Midsummer's Eve, they would come out to play in the sunny clearing. First out would be the mischievous elves!

Music. The Elves – Oliver, Jack and Susie - come and dance about, playing, and then falling about laughing. Elves sit to one side, by tree.

Emily: Sometimes their pranks could upset forest children!

Yolanda comes out crying holding something small.

Yolanda: Those naughty elves - they've squished my little spider! *(sobs & kneels down.*

All children go 'Aaah!'

Emily: But help was at hand - from the friendly fairies!

Music. The Fairies - Suzy, Mollie and Ella - dance around Yolanda, casting a friendly spell and she rises up, smiling.

Yolanda: My spider! He's cured!

Emily: The Elves were just pranksters - they weren't REALLY cruel or evil. But there were some fierce creatures about in the forest. Like the scaly, fire-breathing dragons!

Music. Dragon appears from somewhere else in forest. Imogen, Francesca/Jenny and Rebecca dance around like fire. They go to burn holes in tree.

Emily: They had just burnt two big holes in the oak tree, when a strange and wondrous whinnying was heard. A magical unicorn appeared.

Horn blows. Cathryn appears as Unicorn. Dances about and stops Dragon.

Unicorn: Dragon, Dragon, stop your fire!
Else the forest will expire!
With my magic horn I blow you peace
May your heated outbursts cease!

Emily: And from then onwards the Dragon too became a friend of the forest. All was happy for many, many years. Carry on, Jenny!

Emily goes behind tree with girls.

Jenny: One day some children came through the forest riding horses.

Rebecca, Lilly, Alice and Francesca come on, as if riding.

Jenny: They weren't looking where they were going, so they bumped into the tree.

Alice: Ouch! Stupid old tree!

Lilly: Blocking our way through the forest!

Francesca/Suzy: All droopy and dangly! They should chop it down!

Alice: My father says they should take an axe to all the horrid dark old wood.

Lilly: What use is it to anyone?

Ella: Our houses are built of bricks nowadays!

Alice: This is what I think of the stupid tree. *(She kicks it. Others join in)*

Dramatic Music.

Jenny: Suddenly, they heard a sharp creaking sound.

Action. Alice is pulled inside. She screams.

Francesca: What's happening?

Ella: A door in the tree - opening! Look!

Lilly: Something's dragging her inside!

Ella: STOP IT!

Alice: Help...me!!!

Jenny: They fetched the girl's father.

Father *(Jack)*: You horrid, nasty old oak tree! Give me back my daughter or I'll chop you up into tiny wood shavings!

He chops at tree to repeated Drum Beats.

Jenny: Suddenly, he heard a voice ring out from within the tree.

Soft, eerie Music.

Alice *(and others behind:)* Father, father - do not chop down this tree - for every sharp blow you strike pierces my very heart!

All fall on knees, shocked.

Jenny: And as they knelt there, the little door opened.

Ella: LOOK, LOOK! It's her!

Lilly: She's coming back out of the tree!

Suzy: SHE'S ALIVE!

Alice: We must never cut down this old tree - for all Mother Nature's magical children live inside her - the Elves, the Fairies, the Dragons and the

Unicorns - and if we had no forest - then all the magic would die.

Jenny: And before their very eyes - all the magical creatures came out and joined him a dance.

Emily: And you can join in too!

Music - nature song. All dance - and some of audience. In the middle of the dance Misses Booker return. All quickly come back and sit down except children playing Fred and May. Children start to recite 2 x 2 tables.

Susanne: Ah you see, Miss Booker? Just as I told you, all sitting sweetly enjoying the beauty of Mother Nature. What good children! Your luncheon is ready!

Nellie: Hmm. Children! All rise! Where are Fred and May?

Elsie & Gertie: We'll find them, Miss Booker.

Susanne: Thank you, dears. Follow me and we shall sing as we go!

*All off singing hymn. 'All Things Bright and Beautiful'.
Pause. Music. Spirit Guides appear.*

Spirit Guides: Look! Where? Inside. What's in there? Beyond the bark. Deeper. Under the wood. Under the skin. Beneath the bark. Listen. Smell. Hear. Feel. Once

Two children Fred & May (Letty/Jack or Ben/Francesca) come on again.

Fred: May! They've gone!

May: Where?

Fred: Not sure. That way, I think. Can't see them..

May: What shall we do, Fred?

Fred: Listen.

May: What is it?

Fred: Not sure. A deer maybe.

May: Where?

Fred: That way.

May: What shall we do?

Fred: Let's follow it! Have an adventure!

May: All right. *(changing subject)* Fred....

Fred: What, May?

May: Are you frightened?

Fred (*he is a bit*): No. (*Pause*) Are you?

May (*she is a bit*): No.

Fred: Good. Come on then. (*They run off*) We'll soon find the others. I know my way in these woods.

Spirit Guides: Look! Where? Inside. What's in there? Beyond the bark. Deeper. Under the wood. Under the skin. Beneath the bark. Listen. Smell. Hear. Feel. Once.

Ethereal Music - Clarinet or Flute. They lead the audience off down path and into funnel/ palings. They take up positions around entrance to the large forest clearing.



SCENE 5 THE ELIZABETHAN COMMISSION OF 1596

The Spirit Guides move across into position as the foresters, banging sticks, gathering wood, chopping etc.

From stage left, as it were, also in the distance approaching Commissioners enter counting aloud, measuring and making notes.

Commissioners (*counting*): Holt Park, Eysmans Hill Copse, 35 acres - Clappse Copse, 5 acres - Ragge Copse, 23 acres, good oaks - outside the Park, in the Chase, Dukes Copse, 990 good oaks - Aldermoor Copse, contains alder, ash and oak.

Drum Beats. Everyone into formation, addressing audience directly.

All Commissioners (*in unison*): The Second Royal Commission of Enquiry into the maintenance and upkeep of the Forest of Wimborne Holt, Year of Our Lord 1598.

Sir John Pointz: I, Sir John Pointz, Surveyor to the Duchy of Lancaster, come with the six other Commissioners appointed to reveal the findings of the Second Royal Commission of Enquiry into the boundaries, palings, livestock and timber of Wimborne Holt Forest, property of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth.

All: God Save the Queen!

Commissioners (*in unison*): Authorised record of timber extracted from the Forest.

SFX Chopping. Action.

Company sing whilst cutting and slicing up trees; removing them from forest.

Commissioner 1: 52 trees used in the building of the Guild Chapel at Blandford Forum.

Others bang sticks on trees.

Commissioner 2: 8 trees used for repairs to Holt Chapel on the authority of the Duchy of Lancaster.

Others bang sticks on trees.

Commissioner 3: 4 long straight saplings for the Spire of Wimborne Minster.

Others bang sticks on trees.

Sir John Pointz: And the current quantity of timber in the Forest?

Commissioner 4: 6,697 timber trees of all sizes

Short Drum Roll.

Commissioner 5: 1,524 dotes,

Short Drum Roll.

Commissioner 6: ...which will suffice to maintain the pale for 30 to 40 years

Short Drum Roll.

Sir John Pointz: And what of the deer enclosed by the palings?

Commissioner 3: We have also examined the palings surrounding the forest and counted the deer currently residing in the forest.

Commissioner 1: In 1595, there were 80 head of deer in the Forest and Chase and 60 in the Park.

Commissioner 5: Now, three years later, these numbers have greatly decreased because much of the fencing has been allowed to fall into disrepair.

Action. At rear right Company show hunger caused by lack of wildlife. Searching for food.

Sir John Pointz: What does the Keeper of the Forest say?

All search notes.

Commissioner 2: Appointed Keeper in 1594, Sir Thomas Sherley is rarely if ever in residence, preferring to spend his time travelling abroad or staying in his manor house in Sutton, in the county of Surrey.

Commissioner 6: In his absence, he has however been exceedingly busy. For example, he has purchased Burnt Oak Coppice, in Holt forest, for £20.

Commissioner 4: That same coppice is now utterly spoiled by means of the ill fencing which should have been done.

Commissioner 6: Olde Parke Coppice is in great part nowe clere spoyled with horse-beasts in such sorte as the greatest parte thereof will never be recovered.

Commissioner 5: The park pale adjacent to his lodge is greatly in disrepair. Costs of repairs: 100 tons of timber and cost £40 in labour.

Commissioner 4: Furthermore, we have learnt that during his time as Keeper, Sir Thomas has ordered without authorisation for much of the timber in the forest to be felled and sold, towards his own profit.

Fast Drumming.

Commissioner 3: And allowed most of the property to deteriorate.

Commissioner 2: He also stands accused of purchasing the right to collect tithes from the neighbouring parishes, due to the Governors of Wimborne Grammar

School. The very next day, after his purchase, Sir John is reported to have mortgaged the lease the very next day to a London Goldsmith.

Sir John Pointz: Stop! This Commission must restrict itself to the management of the Forest of Wimborne Holt - and its impact on the farmers and commoners.

Tableaux and Sounds: Starving people.

Commissioner 1: It is also reported that Sir Thomas has allowed certain encroachments upon the Forest by neighbouring landowners in recent years.

Commissioner 2: Sir Matthew Aruyn del of Hampreston has encroached some 200 acres.

Commissioner 3: We find evidence that Mr John Arney of the Manor of Uddens claimed 400 acres of Holt Heath

Commissioner 4: and has been molesting the Queen's tenants who were cutting turf there.

Tableaux at rear: Bailiffs yelling at Tenants, pushing them off land.

Bailiffs: Get off this land now!

Tenants: But we have always had Commoners' Rights to dig turfs!

Bailiffs: Not anymore! Off!

Tenants: How do we warm our cottages? Cook our food?

Bailiffs: Now! Off! Before we set the dogs on you! (*Exeunt*)

Commissioner 5: We also find evidence that Mr John Arney has shut up a lane at Uddens, called Ringwood Waye

Commissioner 6: ...that has been used as a public right of way tyme out of mynde.

Bailiffs form barrier at rear.

Bailiffs: Stop! You're not allowed this way.

Ian: But how do we get to the market at Ringwood in time to sell our crops?

Bailiffs: That's your problem.

Ann Marie: We've always been allowed to travel on this track across the heath.

Naomi: So? Times change. Clear off!

Sir John Pointz: Stop! (*Others write as he speaks*) This Commission of 1598 finds such initiatives to be contrary to the laws proscribed by the Duchy, for the good maintenance and husbandry of the Forest and Heathland of Wimborne Holt. It is therefore recommended that action be taken against the said Sir Matthew Arundel of Hampreston and Mr John Arney of Uddens. And it also recommended that Sir Thomas Sherley be

relieved of his position as Keeper of the Forest of Wimborne Holt forthwith. *(Walking across)* The rights of the commoners as well as the Keeper of the Forest must be respected in such hard times as these.

All: This ends the Commission of Enquiry into the management of Holt Forest, Year of Our Lord 1598. God Save the Queen!

Music as they march away: Hook or By Crook.

Foresters look relieved.

School Children are seen marching down path, looking for Fred & May.

Audience is led on to next scene.



SCENE 6
LOST CHILDREN AND MR GREEN ON A BIKE

Fred: This way, May, come on.

May: What happened to that deer?

Fred: Lost it. *(Pause)*

May: Fred...Where are we?

Fred: Er...well...I think...

May: YES?

Fred: We're in the forest, May!

May: I know that, you daft 'apporth. But where in the forest?

Fred: Well...In a clearin'!

May: Why didn't we stay with the others?

Fred shrugs.

May: We're lost, aren't we?

Fred: NO!

May: We are so!

Fred: NOT! Well..., a little...but only a little.

May: What if a witch comes for us!

Fred *(exasperated)*: May! There aren't no witches, remember? It's just...a forest... a very old...forest.

May *(after pause)*: What we going to do?

Fred: Grampy always says that if you get lost in the forest you should stop and pray.

May: What do we pray?

Fred: Like we do in Chapel. 'I know that my Redeemer Liveth.

May: GO ON...

Fred prays some more. May joins in.

May: Amen.

They settle down by tree in pose with arms around each other leaning on tree. Silence, then mysterious sound is heard.

May: What's that, Fred?

From a distance we hear the sound of George Green singing on his bike as he pedals home from a night in the Old Inn. He is singing a traditional folk song.

May: Listen, Fred. Is it the witch coming, Fred? *(They see the bicycle)*

Fred: On a bicycle? *(Pause)* And singing like a man?

May: Maybe it's an angel - 'cos you prayed, Fred?

Fred: Don't look like an angel neither.

May: Shall we hide, Fred?

Fred: Better. Behind that tree, May. Hurry!

They hide but peep out as George draws closer, then wobbles and falls off his bike, laughing.

May: Is it a ghost, Fred?

Fred *(after a pause)*: No – ghosts don't giggle.

May: How do you know?

Fred: Everybody knows! Ghosts don't giggle, they wail!

George groans - the children are scared and jump back.

Fred *(tearful)*: Let's run for it!

They run off stage left - away from path. May stops first, as George gets to his feet. Sings a bit more of the song, then collapses again with the bike on top of him further along ditch.

May: It's Mr Green, Fred! *(to George)* Is it you, Mr Green?

George: Yes, George Green in the Green, that's me!

Fred: In what?

George: The greenwood! Just like Robin Hood! *(Notices his bike is on top of him)* Who put this 'ere bike on top of me, eh? Was it you two pranskters, eh? Young rascals! Havin' a laugh, eh? Well, don't just stand there, give us an hand!

May: Come on, Fred. It's only Mr Green

Fred: But mother said...

May: Come on - help me lift the bike!

Fred: We shouldn't go near him...

May: Why not?

Fred: 'Cos he drinks like a lord.

May: But the Lord's good, Fred. You should know that. You were just now praying to him.

Fred: Not that Lord, May, 'a' lord - it's a saying, isn't it?

May: Well, I like Mr Green - he gives me apples to eat. I don't care if he does drink to the lord.

Fred (*correcting her*): 'as a lord'.

May (*continuing*): I think we should help him. Be kind. Like it says in the Bible.

Fred: Oh come on, then. (*They help George to his unsteady feet*)

George: Where am I?

Fred: In the forest, Mr Green

May: Don't start all that again, Fred! (*To George*)
You fell off your bike, Mr Green!

Fred: 'Cos you were so ...

May (*angry*): Fred! Mind your manners!

George: Right, then...I'll be on me way home.... (*almost falls down again*)

Fred: Careful! Better rest a moment, Mr Green.

George sets bike against tree. Goes to sit on trunk, as he sings next verse of song.

May: You're a good singer, Mr Green. Did you learn at school?

George: No. School - never spent much time there. Too busy out here in the woods. Learnt all me songs from me father while we was working, see. Arthur, my father's name was. Arthur Green. Couldn't read or write - but he could butcher a pig good as any - and lay hedges and ditches - and sing a good song and tell a good tale. That's why everybody liked him.. (*laughs*) one day, I remember, early morning it were, these posh chaps come banging on our door. (*bangs on trunk*) BANG, bang, bang! (*stands up to imitate men*) We're the agents from up at the big house, at Kingston Lacy " they say. "That's nice for you" says me father. "So, Mr

Green, they goes on - what's with all them holly trees you've planted in your garden then?" "What about 'em" says me dad. "Them's not your property, says the agent. Them belongs to the Bankes family - you stole them"... "No, sir, says me dad. "Them just blowed over my garden fence one night and took root". Blowed over his fence!

He blows, then laughs again. Almost falls backs into ditch.

May: Careful, Mr G...

George (*ignoring her*): But them agents didn't laugh. Faces like pokers. (*imitates them to audience then to Fred & May. Sits.*) They went and took him to court!

Fred: Just for some holly?

George: Just for some holly. But that weren't the end of it, lad. People in the forest didn't like it. Word spread around, see, and all the commoners round here went with my father to the court in Wimborne and paid his fine - 10 shillings it was. So the last laugh was on them Bankes lot - 'cos ever since then, ain't no one been prose...what's it...

Fred: ...cuted?

George: THAT'S IT! No one's been persecuted for borrowing a bit of holly since then. "This forest belongs to all of us" My father used to say. "Not just the rich folk what only come in here once in a while for 'a hunting" or to take out a fine old oak (*pointing*) like that one!

May: That's a good story, Mr Green.

George: It's true as this ditch I fell in. There's lots of good stories about this forest, you know.

May: & Fred: ARE THERE?

George: Oh yes. Some of them are funny - and some of them are scary, (*Children shudder*) Want to hear some?

May: Yes, please, Mr Green.

Fred: But we have to find the other children. We're...a bit lost.

George: Lost? Well, you'd best follow me, then, I know me way through this forest, sober or drunk! I'll see you gets to meet your friends. And while we walk, I'll tell you about the Duke of Monmouth...Ah, well, this goes back a long time, hundreds of years ago. Though time don't mean much in these woods. Like that tree there - see him? He's been here more than 300 years, he has. So he probably stood watching what I'm about to tell 'ee.

They start to go, slowly wheeling off the bike.

George: Well, then, there was once a very rich and noble man, a Protestant by faith, and he was known as the Duke of Monmouth ...me father taught me a song about him, you know.

Fred, May and Mr Green walk towards the washerwomen scene. Mr Green sings as they walk. The audience is turned round to see the scene.

George (*singing*): When stout young Jemmy went abroad
 To see the Northern Races...



SCENE 7

The Washerwomen and the Duke of Monmouth

The Washerwomen, including Amy Farrant, appear with baskets. As they string out line, then take washing from baskets and hang it out, they sing a ballad in the style of late 17th Century, popular songs, to introduce the flashbacks.

The Song is also sung by musicians & Steamheat, as audience process from clearing in wood down to Monmouth scene.

Song: Monmouth and Bucleugh's Welcome from the North or the Loyal Protestants Joy for his Happy Return

When stout young Jemmy went abroad
To see the Northen Races,
He met ten Thousands in the Road,
That swore they were his Graces,
They flock about him day and night,
And made the Skyes to ring
And every one seem to delight
In Monmouth and the King.

Both Gray and Green, both old and young,
The Rich as well as poor,
Had nought but Monmouth on their tongue,
In every Loyal Door,
His Presence made them all rejoyce,
A Happy man was he,
That could prevail with his loud voice,
This noble Duke to see.

A sullen look we could not find
Where ever Monmouth went
The Nobles were exceeding kind,
He gave them great content,
His very Presence like the Sun,
Did drive the Clouds away,
Their Glory they did think begun,
And blest that Happy-day.

Agnes (*as they work*): Our Caleb heard the fishermen talking down Wimborne market not three weeks past. Them boys from Bridport and Lyme, they marched away after the Duke with just their pitchforks and their fish hooks.

Mary: What use'll they be against musket and cannon?

Sara: They have God on their side.

Ruth: That's true, Sara. Well said.

All: May God protect all brave Protestant lads.

Susan: Come on, Amy - wake up!

Amy: Sssh! I heard something. Listen!

Ruth: What is it?

Agnes: Soldiers!

Mary: Whose?

Susan (*pause*): Theirs.

Mary: What'll we do?

Agnes: We've done nothing wrong. Come on - we've work to do.

(Work & Sing)

In King and Monmouth we delight,
And for their lives we pray,
It's they must do the Free-born right,
It's they and only they;
If they be for us, where's the evil,
That we can undergo,
We fear no Duke, no Pope, nor Divil,
Nor any other Foe.

Enter Soldiers.

Soldier 1: Stop that! That's enough! There'll be no more of them rebel songs!! Understand? Monmouth's defeated.

Soldier 2: Beaten by King James II, the true King's Army at Sedgemoor.

Agnes & Mary: No! It can't be true! They said all the people would follow him.

Sara: A true Protestant.

Amy: Where's Sedgemoor, Mary?

Mary: Not around here, Amy.

Soldier 1: Over west in Somerset. Now listen here, you lasses. The pitchfork rebellion is over, understand? The raggle-taggle army have all been killed or wounded. So, we want no more talk of rebellion - nor of a true Protestant King. Do you hear?

Women are crestfallen.

Sara: You shouldn't insult the true religion!

Agnes: Stay calm, Sara!

Sara: Long live the Duke of Monmouth!

Amy: That's true - you tell 'em, Sara!

Soldier 2: Silence! Or we'll shoot!

Women mutter and grumble amongst themselves.

Rosalind, Ann, Beatrice, Jane and Patricia are passing by on the path, gathering wood.

Rosalind (*indicating Sara*): You need to put a gag on that Sara. And that Amy Farrant!

Beatrice: Don't you go causing no trouble now.

Ann: There's been enough fighting and fretting.

Jane: Enough reaping of bitter blood red harvests.

Patricia: True, mother.

Rosalind: You girls are too young to remember - but we all lost menfolk in the Civil War.

Patricia: Brothers...

Beatrice: Husbands...

Jane: Sons...Both of 'em!

Ann: The scars are only just healing.

Patricia: We don't want any more killing. Do we?

Jane: Protestant - Catholic - they both look the same dead!

Rosalind: Monmouth only cared about himself - not the commoners like you and I.

Sara: That's a lie, Rosalind Bradwell. You don't even come from round these parts!

Mary: That's right. You're a filthy foreigner.

Amy (of Rosalind): Where does she come from?

Agnes: Horton.

Soldier 1: Quiet, all of you!

Soldier 2: Now, listen, you Protestant hags! We know Monmouth and some of his cronies have come through this forest. We followed him from Somerset, see?

Soldier 1: And we know his horse went lame so now he's on foot, with only one or two servants to help him.

Soldier 2: Running away, like the gurt cowards they are.

Sara: Lies!

Others: HUSH, Sara!

Soldier 2: But, mark you well, we'll hunt them down and we'll take them squealing like runts before Judge Jeffreys.

Soldier 1: Just tell us where he's hiding and that'll be an end to it all. Peace on English soil.

Agnes: We don't know, sir.

Mary: And we wouldn't tell 'ee if we did neither!

Sara: No, we wouldn't!

Soldier 1: Have you seen him? The Duke of Monmouth? (*holds up portrait*) Here! Look! Here's his portrait.

Rosalind: Tell them and save yourselves, you foolish girls!

Agnes (*impressed*): Handsome, ain't he? Nose as fine as china!

Susan: Eyes like dark blue sloe berries.

Sara: And a true Protestant heart beating in him.

Soldier 2 (*grabs Monmouth's picture*): Won't look so pretty once we've ripped out his true Protestant heart - and the crows and worms have dined on him. (*He spears picture on his stick*) When we put him on a pole - like all the other pitchfork rebels. All harvested and chopped up into nice, neat quarters! The fields of the West Country are stoked full of them!

Soldier 1: So then - which of you has seen him? In his fine livery and all - there's money - a reward!

Ann, Beatrice & Patricia: Think of your starving families!

The Girls shake heads to say 'No'.

Susan: Oh no, sir. Not us.

Agnes: Wish I had, mind. Fine looking gentleman like that.

Mary: He hasn't been this way. It's a mighty big forest. Maybe he went that way. (*Points off*)

Soldier 1: You best be telling us the truth! (*They exit*)

Susan (*to Sara secretively*): What's the Duke doing round here then?

Agnes: Probably trying to reach the coast. Poole Harbour maybe.

Sara: May God keep him safe and speed him on his way.

Mary: Come on, time to fetch the next load.

Agnes, Mary and Sara exit, humming song quietly.

Rosalind: What's that Amy Farrant staring at?

Ruth: That's just her way.

Amy (*to Susan*): Did you see him, Susan? He was so handsome! The Duke of Monmouth!

Susan: Best not to think too much on it, Amy.

Ann: She's a bit of a dolt, that one!

Patricia: That's true and no mistake.

Jane: Just like her mother before her.

Beatrice: And her father too. Remember him? John Farrant.

Rosalind: Forever, traipsing around the woods singing like a lark!

They laugh as they move on up the path - ad libbing.

Susan (*leaving with Ruth in Broad Lawn direction*): Come on, Amy.

Amy (*staying put, thinking*): Eyes big as sloes!

SFX & Music. While she stops to reflect, we hear a noise from other side, voices whispering. Amy is unsure what to do. She starts to call out to Susan, but is too frightened. Monmouth and his friend appear. Amy hides behind tree.

Singing Group: Now the fatal fight is over
Valiant Monmouth must away
While his Enemies did follow
His sacred person to betray
If we had but Ammunition
We had surely won the field,
But we were in a weak condition,
And was forc'd at last to yield!

Aide (*to Monmouth*): Look, Sire. Perfect!

Monmouth: Rags!

Aide: Peasants' smocks, Sire. If we put them on them on quickly, we may yet evade capture. Please hurry, Sire.

Aide gives one smock to Monmouth and starts to put other on himself.

Monmouth (*struggling into smock*): It's wet!

Aide: Sire, there is no time to worry about...

Monmouth: To think it is come to this....

Aide: I implore you to hurry, Sire.

SFX off - hunting horn; dogs barking.

Aide: They are gaining ground on us, Sire.

From her hiding place, Amy steps forward.

Amy: It's you! The Duke of M-m...Monmouth!

Aide hurries to tree and grabs Amy. She is amazed, gawks at Monmouth.

Aide: Shall I kill her, Sire?

Monmouth (*Pause*): No.

Aide: But she will talk, Sire...

Monmouth: No. (*he moves close to Amy. Gently*) You never saw us, did you, child?

Aide: Do you hear? We were never here. Understand? Well?

Music. Amy stares at Monmouth.

Monmouth (*rummages in pocket, finds snuff box*): Here! Take this!

SFX Horn again. Coming closer

Aide: Sire, I beg you - we must fly!

Monmouth looks at Amy once more. Then runs off with Aide. We hear the Soldiers returning, shouting.

Soldiers: Over there! Where the women were! He went that way!

Agnes & Susan return for Amy.

Susan: Amy?

Agnes: Why are you standing there?

Soldiers arrive soon after, pushing through crowd, asking if they saw Duke of Monmouth. They go over to Amy. The other girls run off.

Soldiers: You girl!

Amy (*hiding snuff box*): Me, Sir?

Soldier 1: Where is he?

Amy: Who, sir?

Soldier 2: The Duke of Monmouth, idiot! *(Pause)* Well?

Soldier 1: We know they just now passed here - you must have seen them?
Someone in the farmhouse over there pointed us in this direction.

Amy: No, sir. I saw nothing.

Soldier 1: Then what are you standing here for?

Soldier 2: And shaking like a leaf!

Soldier 1 (*noticing she has something behind her back*): What's that there?

Amy: Nothing, sir.

The Soldiers grab it. They find the snuff box.

Soldier 1: Where did you get this?

Amy: I found it, sir - on the ground....he isn't here, sir.

Soldier 2: LITTLE LIAR!

They grab her.

Soldier 1: Which way did he go?

Soldier 2: If you don't tell us we'll slice up your pretty little throat like a leaf..

Amy (*crying*): That way, sir.

The Soldiers throw Amy down. She weeps.

SONG: Oh, in this wood I do despair
And for our lives do pray
How do I know what game is fair
And what I ought to say?

Repeat song if necessary.

Soldiers reappear with Monmouth & Aide.

Soldier 1: Come, quietly!

Soldier 2: How the mighty fall, eh? Thought you would be King, eh? Now look at you, dressed like a peasant and forced to crawl about like vermin in Dorset ditches! Ha! Ha!

Monmouth looks at Amy.

Soldier 1: What you looking at, Monmouth?

Soldier 2: That's the wench who gave you away!

Amy: No! I...I....They ...forced me...

Soldier 1: Would you listen to her, Sire? Isn't that just like a woman!

Monmouth (*walks over to Amy*): May you, and yours, die a lousy death!

Soldier 2: Come on, you! The hanging judge, Judge Jeffries wants a word with you!

They exit laughing. A drum beats, regimental style. Amy looks at the snuff box, stands head down. Eventually she drops it.

Fred, May and George Green enter watching from side.

George: She stood for a moment, that young maid Amy Farrant. Monmouth's words still in her heart. "May you and yours die a lousy death'. Then she threw the Duke's snuff box into the forest beyond.

Amy throws the box into the wood with a huge throw and then walks away.

May (*looking towards where the box might land*): And was it ever found?

George: It was that. And some do say that Monmouth's curse spread like a poisoned creeper down Amy's family like a creeper with their lives in its grip. Crops failed. Families fell apart. So, children, what's right to do and what's wrong to do? Amy Farrant never knew - she asked her diary over and over what she should have done for the best. My grandmother once told me Amy buried it hereabout - in the roots of a tree.

As singing voice is heard from the wood, May, Fred and Mr Green sit for a moment by the stream, as though listening.

SONG:

Oh, in this wood I do despair

And for our lives do pray

How do I know what game is fair

And what I ought to say?

(Repeat if necessary)

SILENCE for a moment. In the distance children's voices are heard. The children and teachers come along the path through the woods to the clearing.



SCENE 8 OUT OF THE WOODS

Sound of running. Half of the children run ahead of the school party.

Megan (*running ahead*): I remember this path. Look, Miss Booker and Miss Booker! Fred and May – there they are! And there's Broad Lawn.

Susanne: Well done, children. Fred! May! Where have you been? And WHO is this?

Nellie: Indeed. Children, we have been extremely anxious. Have we not instilled in you the danger of straying from the path, of stepping out of line? And have we not impressed upon you the danger of speaking to strange men?

Fred: But Miss Booker – it was the wood made us go exploring.

May: We followed a sound to find a deer.

George: And found me instead! George Green. And the boy is right. When this forest sends its shoots into you, it's hard to resist.

May: Mr Green helped us find you all again, Miss Booker.

Fred: And he's been telling us all about the Duke of Monmouth - we know how he was captured.

May: And Amy Farrant who lived near here – in one of the cottages there, Miss Booker.

Susanne: How educative, children.

Fred: And Mr Green showed us a nuthatch and a Black Cap.

May: And a woodpecker.

Nellie (*to George*): But why are YOU here in the wood?

George: Because, my dear young ladies, I do live here – in a cottage plum in the centre of the forest. And my father before me. And his before him.

Tate: Isn't it dark and lonely, your house?

George: Goodness me, no. I've got cabbages and roses. I've got ducks and chickens. I've got a hearth and as much wood as the forest lets me have.

Molly: But don't you get scared at night, hearing noises in the wood?

George: I do that, hear noises, strange and wonderful noises and then I do imagine all sorts, but these trees never hurt anyone. It's only people who hurt.

Clare: You are very brave, Mr Green.

Ella: And aren't you always getting lost?

George: Never, I know each tree and where it stands. I know their ages and I know summat about what they're good for. In fact, why don't you Misses bring the children up to the cottage one day and I'll show 'em some of the forest's secrets.

Children: YES, please.

Susanne: How wonderful!

Nellie: I hate to interrupt, Mr Green, but we do have to deliver the children out of the forest and back to Broad Lawn before nightfall.

George: So what are we waiting for, my dear?

Nellie looks embarrassed, the children giggle.

George: Let's be off down the path – have you all there in a twinkle of a sparrow's eye. Would you care to ride pillion on my bicycle, dear lady?

Nellie (*takes out hanky*): Oh, well, no, no. I think I should walk, thank you.

The Children leave. SFX – voices of curse, wolves and bears?

Fred: May!

May: What, Fred?

Fred: Did you hear that?

May: Is it the deer again?

Fred: Not sure. Something stirring. Deep in the forest.

Susanne Booker returns, looking for the children.

Susanne: Fred! May! Please, my dears, don't let us lose you again! Come along – let us enjoy the beauty of the evening as we go. Look, they've lit our way. (*as they leave*) Now did I ever tell you about the time my father showed us a beautiful badger? I did? Oh!

*The Company and Audience walk back through woods, lit with candles.
When the audience arrives, the whole company is assembled by the pond.*

Final song: By Hook or By Crook:

Learn the trees' tongues
By hook or by crook
Reach for the fruit
By hook or by crook
Hear the birds' song
By hook or by crook
Find the best path
By hook or by crook

Say the plant's name
By hook or by crook
Watch the seeds fall
By hook or by crook
Weight the wood's charm
By hook or by crook
Lie in its shade
By hook or by crook

Before it's too late
Before it's too late

Hold the tree close
By hook or by crook
Earthed by its age
By hook or by crook
Hear the axe call
By hook or by crook
Louder than words
By hook or by crook

Tell the trees' tale
Tell the trees' tale
Tell the trees' tale

By hook or by crook!

All bow

The End