

WIMBORNE COMMUNITY THEATRE

GRIST TO THE MILL

Sturminster Marshall 2005



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Scene 1: On the Lawn

Daisy is sitting at the table on her mobile phone, the river behind her. She is supposed to be revising: "The Mill on the Floss" is on the table.

In the distance we can see Rose by the river.

Children sing: "Flow, flow, flow, the water is leaving the Mill, under the bridge, on to the ocean..."

Daisy: Really? (Pause) Oh my God! (Pause) Amazing! (Pause) Yeah..

Rose (calling out as she approaches): Daisy! Daisy!

Daisy (still talking on the phone): He did what? That is so **cool!** (To Rose) What?

Rose: Come and play!

Daisy: I'm revising for my exams!

Rose (sits): So why are you on your mobile?

Daisy: Go away, Rose!

Rose: But I'm bored! I want you to come and play with me!

Daisy: Go and talk to Gran.

Rose: She's busy too. Giving another talk about the Mill.

Daisy: (To phone) Just a sec, Gemma. (To Rose) Why don't you go and listen to it, then?

Rose: I don't want to. I've heard it about a squillion times. Boring. Just loads of dusty old names of bits of machines. Please come and play!

Daisy: NO! (To phone) Gem? You're breaking up ...Gem ...Are you still there? Oh pants!

Rose: Daisy! You'd better not let Gran hear you talk like that!

Daisy: Just leave me in peace, Rose.

Pause while Rose goes to sit next to Daisy stage left, settles herself and speaks thoughtfully.

Rose: Do you think Mum and Dad are in Australia yet?

Daisy: Yes, lucky devils. Why did I have to end up here, stuck with you and Gran?

Rose jumps up angrily, sulkily showing her feelings in the way she storms off to look towards the river.

Daisy: Rose! Come back. I didn't mean it! Sorry.

Rose: Please will you play with me, Daisy?

Daisy: I've got to do this history, a lot of learning, about what people did. *(Pause)*

Rose: In the old days?

Daisy: Yeah, stuff like that.

Rose *(sits again – in other seat)*: I wonder what it would be like to live in the old days. Sometimes this old place makes me imagine ... all sorts of things.

Daisy: I'm a bit too old for kids' stuff like that, Rose. *(Pause)* But I remember when I came here ages ago for holidays – before you were born. I used to ...

Rose: What?

Daisy: It's silly really.

Rose: Go on, go on, please!

Daisy: Well, it's just ... I used to pretend ... I can't believe I'm telling you this. If you ever, ever tell any of my friends, I will kill you, yeah?

Rose: You can trust me, Daisy!

Daisy: Well, Gran used to tell me stories.

Rose: Did she?

Daisy *(gets up and becomes more free, playful around the tree, enthusiastic)*: And ... I sort of imagined like ... I met ... the little boy who used to live here when it was still a working Mill. Joyce was his name.

Rose: Funny name for a boy!

Daisy: That was his surname! Harry was his first name, Harry Joyce. Hmm! I used to pretend he was still here and we played games in the trees and ...

Rose: And what!

Daisy: I've got to get on with my revision.

Rose: Oh Daisy, you're such a spoilsport! What did you play with Harry Joyce?

Daisy: Rose! I've got to get on!

Pause. Rose gets up and moves towards bridge as she speaks.

Rose: Just one more thing!

Daisy: Rose, you're getting very irritating!

Rose: What does transported mean? Exactly?

Daisy: Transported?

Rose: Yes.

Daisy: Why?

Rose: Just wondered ...

Daisy: It means taken away to another place. Actually, I rather wish you'd be transported!

Rose: But why is it written up on the bridge there – about people damaging the bridge?

Daisy (*accusingly*): Have you been playing up on the bridge?

Rose: No!

Daisy: It's dangerous up there. What with all the traffic. Gran told you not to.

Rose: Well, you never play with me. Anyway, I didn't say I had been there. I just wondered what the sign means. Gran told me about it, ACTUALLY! Anyway, I'm not a baby, you know! I do know about Road Safety! So there! (*sticks her tongue out*)

Daisy: You want to be careful, the wind'll change and you'll get stuck like that.

Gran arrives.

Gran: Girls! Girls! What are you arguing about?

Rose: I only asked her about the bridge, about what can happen if ...

Daisy: How am I ever going to get my work done with non-stop interruptions? I'm going to go indoors and see if I can get through to Mum and Dad again. The signal might be better upstairs. *(she exits and enters the Mill)* Just stay away from the bridge, Rose, or else *(she pretends to be scary)*

Rose: Granny, why is that bridge so precious, that if I damaged it ...?

Gran: Rose, where would we be without bridges? They take people from A to B, from here to there, from then to now, *(pause)* from now to when? Does that answer your question?

Rose: I'm not sure that it does.

Gran: Once upon a time to damage a bridge was a very great sin – a felony, no less, and a chunk taken out of that bridge would transport you good and proper into another world.

Rose: I wouldn't want to hurt a bridge but I would very much like to go into another world.

Gran *(laughs)*: Well, one of the worlds felons were transported to was Australia.

Rose: Imagine, I could go and see Mum and Dad!

Gran: Look at the light on the water, there under the bridge. See how it glows! D'you know what my mother always said to me? Try and just enjoy what you see around you. Be self-sufficient.

Rose: But at my age, I have to ask people things, to find out. Like that story you told me about little Harry Joyce, the Miller's boy who lived here once?

Gran: The Miller's boy. Yes ... who became a bank manager in Parkstone. And a great naturalist, knew the names of every bird, flower, fish and fowl on the River Stour ...

Rose: What was he like? Did he play right here on the river bank?

Gran: Of course. He lived here for a while. But I haven't got time now, darling. I've got to finish writing a talk for the WI. You go and play but take double care near the water.

Gran settles down at the table as Rose walks hurriedly off towards the bridge.

Gran (*re-reading talk to point she's reached, skipping over it*): Now where did I get to?
'Mill was substantially rebuilt .. 1776 .. Henry Bankes .. Records show how
tenant John Joyce agreed to pay £20 rent a year .. From reconstruction in
1776 .. Mill occupied by the Joyce family until 1906 .. The last Miller was T D
Joyce .. died ..' (*begins to write new text*) 'His children loved to peer over the
bannisters at night to overhear their father singing ballads to musical friends.'

Gran looks up and sees Rose on the bridge. She shows surprise and alarm.

Rose: I want to be ... I want to be ... I want to be ... transported.

*At that very moment, loud singing from the Mill (Gilbert and Sullivan) and a significant sound
from the undergrowth – perhaps a firework. For a moment everything is spellbound. Gran
jumps up in alarm. Rose hurries back.*

Daisy (*opens upstairs window, leans out and points frantically. She shouts*): Look, Look!
There's people on a boat coming in to land. I'm coming down.

*Daisy comes tearing into the garden and she, Rose and Gran find somewhere to hide
themselves, although seen by audience, as they watch the arrival from a short distance so
as not to be seen by boat occupants. As boat approaches we can hear voices arguing
which continues as the characters land and begin to enter the garden.*

Mary: Stur people, they listen to no-one, always wittering on, stirring up trouble ...

Cressida: And Shapwick folk – think they're better than the rest of the world.

Mary: Too much poking around in freezing cold water, picking watercress or looking
for their lost bell ... I doubt they could tell the difference between a water rat
and an otter ...

Cressida and Mary improvise here.

Young Joyce: D'you remember that time we stepped out of the boat onto a swan's egg –
what a mess!

Older Joyce: And a stench – I remember – couldn't clean it off and had to bury my boot in
the earth.

Young Joyce: Look over there, that's where the kingfishers lived ... and that's where we
chased the stoat out over the meadow.

Norah (*runs out of Mill apparently not seeing Rose, Daisy and Gran at first*): At last, at last!
Welcome back, my old friends. Mary, Cressida, Master Harry Joyce!

*The occupants of the boat quieten down as they come into the garden, greeting Norah,
kissing and shaking hands, and answering her questions – improvised.*

Norah: I wondered if the moment would ever be right. To bring us all back. Did you have a good journey? Enough to eat and drink? No storms or tempests? No shipwrecks? Then once you get your landlegs back, we can begin our game.

Young Joyce: What a treat to be home again. You look just the same, Norah.

Norah: And so do you, Master Harry.

Young Joyce: And smell that bread! Is it for us?

Norah: Wait and see, my dear boy. All will be revealed. But, Harry, who's this?
(*pretending not to recognise him*) Aren't you going to introduce me?

Older Joyce (*steps forward*): I'm surprised you don't recognise me, Norah. How often you said "Harry, I can just imagine what sort of man you'll be when you grow up and how I should like to be there to see you."

Norah: And so in my heart, I knew I would, I knew you would come.

Mary: There's quite some things around here I don't recognise. And there are other things (*looking at Cressida*) that are rather too much the same.

Norah: Enough of that. We've got work to do!

Reaction from Gran, Rose and Daisy.

Young Joyce: Work? I've been thinking all the way here that we were going to play our game – with some new people.

Norah: And so we shall. First a quick count up. (*points and counts*) One, Two, Three, Four, Five – oh dear! (*mock alarm*) Oh, very dear, not quite enough people for our very important game. And where, oh where, can we find more players?

All looking very obviously about, moving around as though searching the area, bending, on tip toes, until all at once they stop and point to the girls hidden in the undergrowth.

Norah: I do believe Six and Seven are just over here. (*she walks over to them*)

Rose and Daisy are revealed. All act delighted.

Young Joyce (*excitedly*): And there is Eight, hiding in the nettles!

Rose: Who are you? Where've you come from?

Cressida: From around and about, my dears. My name is Cressida Rivers, long-standing resident of Sturminster Marshall and plucker and purveyor of the finest watercress on the River Sour. And this Master Joyce and Mr Joyce.

Joyces (*bow and speak in unison*): And this is ...

Mary: Mary White, at your service, Reddlewoman and resident of the ancient village of Shapwick.

Gran (*hurrying in concerned and confused*): But excuse me, please. If you're Wimborne Historical Society you're booked in for next weekend. And I certainly wasn't expecting you to come in costume!

Norah (*goes up to greet Gran warmly*): Welcome, number Eight! (*as though quoting*) Eight, (*dramatically*) the number of Paradise regained. "After seven days of fasting the eighth day brings renewal." So now we can begin!

Rose: Has it taken you seven days to get here?

Older Joyce: Ah, Rose, wild rose, rambler, climber, which is you?

Daisy: And what are you expecting us to begin?

Gran: I'm not sure this will be allowed. I shall have to phone up Head Office and speak to ...

Older Joyce: What's for tea, Norah?

Norah: Why, I've baked the Lucky Charm breads!

Young Joyce: Goody! Goody! My favourite!

Norah: How else to play the game?

All: That's right! How else, Norah?

Norah: So then, dear friends of White Mill, old and new. It's a beautiful day and time to play ...

All: Grist to the Mill!

Rose: How do we play?

Daisy: This is actually quite cool.

Norah (*to Rose*): First, Eight make a circle.

Mary: A wheel, a stone, a round about.

Older Joyce: Of the square into the circle.

Cressida (*to Rose*): Of the past into the now.

Mary: Of the now into the then.

They surround Daisy, Rose and Gran.

Cressida: Eyes closed, mind!

Mary: And no peeking!

Norah: Music!

They dance around.

Norah (*chanting*):
Make of our game
Just what you will
But let these three
Go through the Mill.
When they've seen the daily grind
I wonder what else they'll find.

The grain goes up
The flour comes down
And so the world goes round and round!

Three times to the left and three to the right
Dance, dance with all your might,
Now all us ancients go out of sight!

All spin off towards the Mill, except Rose, Daisy and Gran. Eerie music. They come to looking eager and enthusiastic.

Rose: Hello? Hello? Where've they gone?

Daisy: Into the Mill, I bet.

Gran: What are we waiting for? You wanted an adventure, Rose, and we're about to have one.

Norah (*from the door of the Mill*): This way, my friends. (*beckons the audience to follow*)
Well, what are you waiting for? Come and play the game. No rushing, mind!
The wheels are turning slowly back! So slowly, eh!



Scene 2: Going through the Mill

School children singing at entrance to the Mill.

Make of our game
Just what you will
But let these three
Go through the Mill.
When they've seen the daily grind
I wonder what else they'll find.

The grain goes up
The flour comes down
And so the world goes round and round!

Three times to the left and three to the right
Dance, dance with all your might.

The audience file through, experiencing sounds, tableaux and events on their way.

1. Sound track to show use of building as cutting-edge technology and a place of work:
 - Factory noises of machinery
 - Grinding machinery
 - Workers' voices overheard
 - Shouting
 - Laughter
 - Whistling
 - Singing
 - Squeaking and banging doors
 - Soft noises, e.g. flour, grain
 - Wood ratchet noises
 - Water falling
2. Dark areas illuminated with lamps or candles.
3. People:
 - In small intimate spaces as in worlds of their own
 - Carrying out repetitive tasks, e.g. lifting sacks, passing sacks from one to another, oiling wheels, etc.
 - Some looking out to audience but not seeing them

Some just being there, resting after work, looking at hands, talking to some imaginary person, etc.

Someone looking into window, someone looking out of window

4. Tableaux:

Dead man lying in the space under the water wheel

Young man and woman (Nancy, the Joyce's nurse maid, and Isaac, the farm hand) embracing in a shadowy corner

Figure opening the door and dropping a heavy sack on the Mill floor, then exiting again – repeated.



Scene 3: Songs for Breaking Bread

As the audience leaves by the back door of the Mill, Norah ushers them out and gives out small bread rolls. The scene starts when all the audience are outside and Mary, Cressida and Young Joyce and Older Joyce are also in place.

Norah (*to children*): Thank you for such a lovely entertainment.

She encourages applause. Then she addresses Rose, Daisy and Gran.

Norah: And now, my good friends, it's your turn at last to break bread. Who will be first?

Gran (*to Rose*): Rose, dear, you are the youngest, you go first!

Rose: Harry's younger than me!

Norah: But you are the visitor. You choose first!

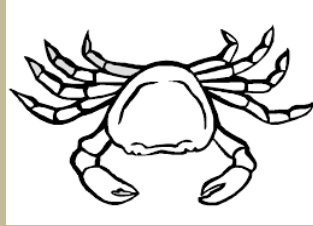
Rose takes a loaf from Norah's basket, breaks it and reveals a charm, holding it up. All show amazement.

Rose: A Crab!

Norah: Very well, Cressida Cresswell. You will tell the first tale.

Cressida: And a good'un it'll be too, have no fear! Come along, all of you, follow me over here.

She leads the audience to the bottom of the back garden facing up to the top.



Scene 4: The Crab Charm: The Story of the Shapwick Monster

Music until all the audience is settled at the bottom of the garden.

Cressida: Well now, all ready and settled? My story is a very sad story. *(gets audience to say "Aah!")* I've asked my good friends from Sturminster Marshall to help me tell it. Come along, all of you!

Action: *All charge on raucously.*

Cressida: I said it was a SAD story!!

Action: *The troupe all change accordingly and go into first positions: Jeff at stage right in profile holding reins, Sandy behind him, Ellie squatting towards Jeff, Jackie crouched, then Ella as Crab squatting facing Jeff.*

Cressida *(making sweeping actions, moving about as she speaks):* This sad story, friends, is about the especially clever folk of the nearby village of Shapwick, or Shapick as some like to pronounce it.

One dark and stormy night when the moon was a ghost lying low in the sky, a young and handsome fishmonger from Poole *(Jeff turns to smile at the audience)* was rattling along in his cart heading for market, not a mile from this very spot where we are now!

Action: *All make SFX of rain and wind and rattle about in the cart.*

Now that handsome young fishmonger from Poole's cart was full to bursting with a fine harvest from the sea - fresh still-flapping fish such as haddock, sole, plaice, whiting, mackerel and turbot, not to mention the biggest crustaceans and crabs you've ever clapped your eyes on! On, on the cart rattled! On through the wind and the rain!

Action: *Cressida moves around, flailing her arms, urging louder SFX from all.*

The rain whipped at his youthful but weather-beaten face until he could take it no more!

Action: *SFX wind and rain. More rattling and rolling.*

Fishmonger: Oh, what a wretched and forlorn night is this! Scarcely a moon to keep me company on this lonely road. My drenched bones stone cold. I'm sick of listening to all these scuttling, skittering sea creatures. Ahoy there! I spy some trees!! Shelter from the storm to port! A moment's respite, that's all I need. Is that too much to ask? And a little tot of something to keep out the fierce chill!

Cressida: And with a mighty yank on his reins, the handsome young fishmonger steered his cart to a new course, so causing one of his finest crabs (*Action: Ella moves on each verb*) to go slipping, skittering and sliding over the edge of the basket in which it was captive and right over the edge of the cart to land SPLAT! in the middle of a watery Shapwick lane.

Action: Crab tumbles off cart and skitters way.

Cressida: Now, it just so happened, the handsome young fishmonger was not the only one who'd been wetting his whistle that night! Close by, the upright villagers of Shapwick were just tumbling out of their local hostelry, a mere stone's throw up the lane.

Action: New Tableau: All form drunken pose, leaning on each other.

Cressida: Did I say upright villagers? Oh well ... they had not staggered more than a few yards up the road, when they spotted something shiny and strange, the like of which they had never spied before, weaving its way slowly, unstoppably towards them.

Action: All shocked. Villagers speak.

Villagers: LOOK!

Villager 1: What can it be?

Villager 2: Dunno!

Villager 3: Me neither!

Villager 4: Never seen nothing like it!

Ellie: Stay back from it! Stay back! 'Tis the devil himself! Oh, run for your lives!

Action: All scream and run back.

Cressida: Well, those brave Shapwick villagers, stone cold sober and wide awake as they were now, decided they needed some expert advice right away. So off they went to visit the wisest elder of them all, a gnarled and grizzled shepherd, by the name of Obadiah, who was to be found as usual in his well-appointed mansion, which to you and I took the form of a creaky old wheelbarrow.

Action: *New Tableau: Sandy asleep in a wheelbarrow, snoring. Villagers knock loudly, calling out.*

Obadiah: WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY WAKING ME UP IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT?

Action: *All speak very fast, gesticulating wildly. We hear the odd word – “Devil”, “Monstrous apparition”.*

Obadiah: Very well! Take me to see this ... this appartionishioner!

Action: *Villagers act out her words as Cressida speaks.*

Cressida: And off they hurried, fast as their ale-laden legs'd carry them until they reached the sea creature, still skittering about on the road.

Obadiah: Ooh! Aaah! Eeeh! T-t-t-t-Tut! Tut! Phew!

Action: *Crab tries to pinch him. Obadiah inspects the Crab. Pokes at it with a long stick.*

Taking all things into consideration – all those many legs and the quantity of pink body and the thickness of his armour, I can with great assurance say, after weighing the pros and cons, the ups and downs, going round and round the mulberry bush, ...I hereby declare ..

All: Yes, Obadiah?

Obadiah: It is indeed a land monster!

Action: *All give shocked reaction. Some say “I told you so!”*

Obadiah: Now, wheel me back home! At once!

Action: *They carry him home again. Freeze.*

Cressida: So, off the good people of Shapwick did start to stagger and stumble. But ... at the very same moment along came the handsome young fishmonger, fresh from his slumbers beneath the trees, after spotting his crab had gone missing and hearing all the kerfuffle and commotion.

Fishmonger: What's going on here, then?

All: Take care, stranger!

Fishmonger: Why?

Villager 1: The devil has come to Shapwick.
Villager 2: He's taken the form of a little land monster.
Villager 3: And come to terrorise our village!
Villager 4: Keep well back, stranger!

Fishmonger: A MONSTER! WHERE IS IT THEN?

Villagers (*pointing to Crab*): There! Don't go too close, mister, else ... else ... there's no telling what it'll do ...

Fishmonger: WHAT? THAT? A MONSTER? HA, HA! THAT'S A GOOD 'UN! That ain't no monster, you ninnies! That's a fine fresh crab what I caught off Poole harbour this last morning! And I'll be selling it in the Blandford market early tomorrow morning.

Villagers: No! It can't be true!

Fishmonger: Ain't you Shapwick folk never seen a crab before? Well, if that don't take the ship's biscuit! Ho! Ho! Just wait till I tell everyone roundabouts about this! Hee! Hee! The Shapwick Monster! Ha! (*he picks up Crab*) Mind you, it is a good size crab!

Crab (*trying to scare Villagers who step back again*): What a gaggle of gurt galloots!

Cressida: And so my story ends, friends. A story of the clever folk of Shapwick and how they learnt just a little more about sea life one rainy night from a handsome young fishmonger from Poole. And from what I've heard tell, they haven't changed much since then! And probably never will!
Thank you all for your hearing!

Norah: Right then. Who's going to pick the next bread?

Gran: Daisy! I think it's your turn!

Daisy (*picks bread from Norah's basket*): A Mill!

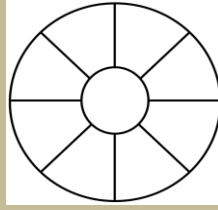
Norah: So it's the Miller's tale next then! Or at least his little boy, Harry's! Listen! I can hear him singing! Lovely voice! Enough to make me cream curdle! Ah! And look Master Harry and his friends are playing a little game!

Daisy: Looks like Grandmother's Footsteps!

Gran: Indeed! Shall we proceed?

Norah: Indeed, indeed. Follow on, friends. Women and children first!

The audience is turned around and led by Norah to the well outside the back door of the Mill.



Scene 5: The Mill Charm: The Story of the Joyce Family

As the audience approaches, children are playing a game of Grandmother's Footsteps. Young Joyce beckons Rose and Daisy to join in. They do. Once the audience is settled, they all run off inside the house and disappear. Singing fades.

Older Joyce (*with his book*): So, dear guests, it's time for my story. My early memories of White Mill. I suppose the story must start with my father's singing. It took him to every village and town within a ten mile radius! For many years I do not think there was a concert within reach of horse conveyance at which he did not assist. And how carefully he would rehearse inside the Mill! And while he would practise, we children would sit listening, staring through the bannisters indoors.

Singing continues.

Gran: How fascinating. You know ...

Daisy: What, Gran?

Gran: Well, the thing is, every now and again, I .. I .. well, it's probably awfully silly but ...

Rose: Go on, Gran.

Gran: I feel as though I've heard that voice before ... singing ... somewhere in the house ... it can be quite lonely out here ...oh, probably just me being a silly old thing!

Daisy: No, Gran. I've heard it before too.

Gran: Really?

Rose: I wish I had.

Norah: You have, my dear. You are. Now.
"Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future and time future contained in time past."

Gran: But how frightfully rude we're being! We're interrupting Mr Joyce's story.

Older Joyce: My dear lady, do not concern yourself! But I wonder which part of my childhood here at White Mill the young ladies would be interested to hear about?

Daisy: When your nurse maid got you into trouble!

Gran: Daisy! How on earth do you know about this?

Rose: Oh, Daisy used to play with Harry when she was little!

Daisy: Rose! You promised not to tell!

Rose: Sorry, Daisy! But it's only Gran – no one else is listening! *(pause for audience reaction)* Please, carry on, Mr Joyce! How did it happen?

Older Joyce: Marbles!

Rose: Marbles?

Older Joyce: I was playing marbles with my sisters. *(pointing to space)* Right .. here ..

Three children hurry out noisily, Young Harry Joyce and his two sisters, Dora and Margaret.

Dora: Did you take them? Did you?

Young Joyce: Of course not, and anyway you don't need marbles – we can play with pebbles. *(they crouch down and begin)* Look, like this ...

Margaret: Let me have a go then. Just 'cause you're a boy, doesn't mean you're superior, you know! *(a bit of arguing and playing takes place)*

Older Joyce: Almost without our noticing, out came our nurse maid, Nancy.

Nancy, the nurse maid, enters from the other door.

Older Joyce: As I recall, she was more than a little distracted by the farm boy, Isaac.

Isaac appears from behind the audience.

Isaac: Alright, Nancy? Got something to show you.

Nancy: What would that be then?

Isaac comes up to Nancy and does trick of putting a stone up his nose. Nancy laughs.

Nancy: What you doing, Isaac Ricketts? Look, children, look at Isaac!

Children watch with interest.

Young Joyce: Can I try?

Dora: Bet you can't do it!

Margaret: I don't think you should, Harry. You've got a cold and it'll get stuck up your runny nose and be very messy. And it'll hurt.

Young Joyce puts the stone up his nose and it gets stuck. He makes scared worried noises. Dora runs to the door.

Dora: Mother, Mother, come quickly!

Young Joyce is jumping up and down in pain.

Dora: If we'd had our marbles, this wouldn't have happened.

Mrs Joyce appears from the house.

Mrs Joyce: Whatever is the matter?

Margaret: Mother! Harry's got a stone stuck up his nose.

Nancy is panic stricken. Isaac backs away quickly.

Mrs Joyce: Oh, Lord Alive! You silly boy. *(she yanks his head back and looks up his nose)* Nancy, don't just stand there like a lummo, fetch me my button hook off the dresser at once. *(Nancy rushes indoors and she calls after her)* The long-handled one with the very fine hook. *(to Young Joyce)* Whatever made you do such a foolish prank?

Young Joyce *(pointing towards where Isaac went)*: It was Isaac's trick.

Margaret: He and Nancy showed us how to magic a stone through our head and ...

Dora: Tell Tale Tit!

Mrs Joyce: That Nancy!

Nancy arrives back with large tongs.

Mrs Joyce: Not those, Nancy! Those are what Mr Joyce uses for opening his sacks! The button hook, girl! On the dresser! Oh, hurry! *(Nancy hurries off again)* This is dangerous nonsense, children! Games with any risk of danger are not to be tolerated. Do you understand?

Children: Yes, Mother.

Nancy comes back with the button hook, followed by Norah holding a cat. As Young Joyce squeals, Mrs Joyce makes a show of retrieving the stone.

Norah: There, there, Master Harry. Soon be over.

Mrs Joyce: Now come along inside, all of you. You are going straight to your bedroom! And Norah!

Norah: Yes, Ma'am?

Mrs Joyce: No cossetting Harry, please! *(she leaves)*

Norah: Oh, no, Ma'am. *(she whispers to Young Joyce)* Puss and I'll bring you up a nice piece of bread and jam, Master Harry!

They exit into Mill.

Rose: Were you always good after that, Mr Joyce?

Older Joyce: Bless me, my child, no. I was often in trouble for one thing and another. It was only the threat of Tommy Ticklemouse that would reduce me to a reasonable state of mind.

Rose: What's that?

Older Joyce: A little stick of hazel! My father kept it in view behind a small water colour painting of the Mill. But I must confess it was applied to me on numerous occasions. And one of them concerned stones again – but this time, in all honesty, it was my sister Dora's fault. It started with that apple tree over there.

Audience are turned away from the well to face the apple tree in the lower garden.

Scene around the Apple Tree:

Music. All enter from the far door and go into positions. Young Joyce is over by the river. Dora is playing closer to the others. Margaret is helping Nancy put out the washing. Isaac is nearby cutting grass.

Nancy goes over to flirt with Isaac. Margaret is very interested.

Dora tries to get an apple from the tree. She asks Margaret for help. Margaret refuses because she is more interested in watching the flirting.

Dora fetches Young Joyce. He tries to climb the tree. Dora suggests throwing a stone up. Young Joyce mimes picking up and throwing a stone into the tree – twice.

The third stone hits Dora's head. Young Joyce asks if she is alright. Dora doesn't make any fuss. She says she's fine and tells him to try again.

Margaret comes over and notices the blood. Dora starts to scream and cry.

Nancy rushes over and is angry. She tells Young Joyce off and takes him to his father for a good beating.

Harry: It's not fair!

They exit.

Older Joyce: I got a very close visit from Tommy Ticklemouse for that misdemeanour.

Rose: But it wasn't really your fault, Mr Joyce!

Older Joyce: No. But never mind! Norah here – she was always my salvation! Always kind. Much kinder than we deserved, I believe!

Norah: Nothing a little bit of bread and jam can't put right, eh, Mr Harry?

Older Joyce: I am sure we must have been a sore trial to you, Norah.

Norah: No, No. Boys will be boys.

Cressida: I remember he were a little out of order when I first met him ... when I came a-calling one fine day.

Older Joyce: Yes, indeed. I remember it well. I noticed first, forgive me, dear lady, your unusual apparel and the withy basket hanging from a piece of string from your shoulders.

Action: Cressida strikes a pose. The two sisters and Young Joyce appear.

Sisters: "Who is that?"

Older Joyce: My sisters asked. And I, to my shame, replied,

Young Joyce: "Just some old tramp!"

Norah: And a few minutes later your father sent me to give you a message to come to the bakehouse.

Older Joyce: And there was my father standing with Cressida!

The Miller appears.

Norah: And your dear father, he said,

Miller: "What did you say this woman was?"

Young Joyce: "An old tramp."

Cressida: And your dear father replied,

Miller: “Well, she is not a tramp. She is an honest watercress seller and a friend of mine. You must tell her you are sorry for what you said and promise you will never be rude to her again.”

Norah: And you did and you never were, Master Harry! Now then, talking of bread, it's your turn to pick the next piece!

Young Joyce picks the Bell.

Norah: The Bell! Mary! Your turn, Mary!

Mary is snoring at the corner of the house. She wakes up.

Mary: Oh, my turn, is it? At long last! Thought we was going to hear another yarn from Cressida, (*mocking*) the Miller's best friend here again! Cressida the Stur Rat!

Norah: No need for that, Mary!

Mary: Well, I was the Miller's friend too, you know! (*archly*) Many's the time we would sing together up by the bridge there! Like sky larks, we was! Would you like to hear one of me ditties now?

She sings a little crankily to introduce the story of the Bell.

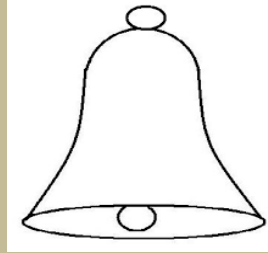
Norah: Perhaps just get to the story, Mary.

Mary: Very well, then, I shall. We all heard before from our friend Cressida about the stupidity of the villagers of Shapwick where my kin do hail from. So now, I shall tell you a story about the people of Sturminster Marshall. Then you'll really know who's the daft happorths of the parish!

Cressida: Get on with it then!

Mary (*rings a bell*): Bells to you! Over this way! Towards the bridge! For that's where my tale lies! Follow my bell.

She leads the audience round the side of the house to the grassy area between the Mill and the bridge.



Scene 6: The Bell Charm: The Story of the Knowlton Bell

Note: Lots of physical theatre in this scene.

As the audience assemble, they see the Sturminster Marshall Villagers (Chris, Alex, Jack, Lilly, Kate) in a huddle beginning their planning. Sound of a bell ringing.

Mary: Listen! Shh! Listen hard! (*pointing*) Over there. Ringing out soft. Beneath the water. Hear, what it's saying? Hear what the clapper's saying in the hollow of the bell? Once, it's saying, there was a bell in Knowlton church – due east from here – maybe three miles – a beautiful and a valuable bell that many people coveted – especially the poor families of Sturminster Marshall over yonder. They coveted the Knowlton bell so much that it excited their cupidity and ignited their stupidity and so one cold snowy night, they gathered together to make a brilliant plan.

The Villagers in a huddle speak.

Chris: We'll take it to the coast, cross the Channel and sell it for a fortune.
Kate: We need horses and a good strong cart.
Jack: We need the Miller's cart.
Alex: He's not going to like it.
Lilly: He's not going to know.
Kate: And what about our footprints in the snow?
Chris: Leading us into the courthouse if we're not cunning.
Lilly: Let's make some false horseshoes ...
Chris: And turn 'em round the other way.
Alex: So it looks like we're going from where we're coming ...
Kate: Or we're coming from where we're going ...
Chris: Right then, let's be about it 'fore we freeze to death!

All freeze as if about to take action.

Mary: So the Stur Rats ...

Cressida (*crossly*): HOY!

Mary: You've had your turn, Cressida Water-Rat Rivers! Now it's ours! So shove your cress in your gurt gob!

Norah: Steady on, girls! Steady!

Gran: Ladies, I don't think there's any call for language like that ... Pas devant les enfants!

Cressida and Mary: What's that mean?

Older Joyce: Not in front of the children!

Daisy: We don't mind.

Rose: We're from the twenty-first century, you know!

Villagers: Can we just get on with it?

Rose: Yes, we'd like to hear the rest of the story!

Mary (*warning Cressida*): As long as you stow your gob!

Mary (*under breath*): Crustaceans!

Mary: What?

Chris: We'll show 'em, Mary! In the story!

Mary: Yes, well, as I was saying before I was ... the poor Stur Rats ... I mean, villagers ... searched for all the tools they could find.

Music. Action.

Mary: And loaded them onto the cart they'd stolen ... borrowed from the Miller of this very place we're standing in now!

Music. Action.

Mary: And they made their way in bright moonlight over the iron-hard ground across the lanes and meadows due east to Knowlton.

Music. Action: Freeze frames.

Mary: And stopped before the ancient church within the Rings.

Chris (*looking at the tree*): Look, my dears! Knowlton! See how the church stands in its ancient circle like a jewel.

Mary (*to audience*): Use your imagination!

Children position themselves to form a bell.

Chris: And, see there, in the crown, shining with frost and snow, is the diamond, the Bell. So let us begin our work.

Mary: And so they did.

Sturminster Marshall Villagers speak.

Chris: All we have to do is climb the bell tower.

Lilly: Who d'you think we are?

Alex: I can't climb! (worried reactions)

Kate: Here on my shoulders.

Jack: Higher, higher.

Lilly: Get the pole in here.

Alex: Here take the weight.

Kate: It's yours. Quick, another pole in there, it's too heavy for my arms.

Chris: Now, slowly ... slowly and onto the cart.

Voices of Knowlton Villagers shouting from behind the audience.

Voice 1: Whoa there! What's your game?

Mary: Shouts a voice in the Knowlton dark.

Voices: Whoa, stop your thieving, whoa!

Mary: And more and more Knowlton voices come up over the Rings on the tracks of those Stur Rats, quick as a flash in the winter night!

Sturminster Marshall Villagers speak. All perform actions to match words.

Alex: Change round the horseshoes. (*Action*)

Lilly: Heave the cart from its snowy tracks. (*Action*)

Jack: Whip the horses into life. (*Action*)

Mary: And back they raced with their hearts in their mouths, with no breath to speak.

Action: All face the audience, running on the spot, miming heavy panting and exhaustion.

Mary: Until they'd reached White Mill bridge with their pursuers closing in ...

Sturminster Marshall Villagers speak.

Chris: Stop here, (*panting*) we've got to ditch it now.

Kate: What, after all that effort and all that danger?

Sounds of the Knowlton Villagers getting nearer. They speak.

Voice 2: Unless you want to be skinned alive.
Voice 3: We'll be back when the trail's gone cold.

Sturminster Marshall Villagers speak.

Alex: So heave it! Take the strain!
Jack: And ... away it goes!

Sound: Bell plunging, scary underwater bell sounds, enough to frighten the Knowlton gang away too.

Action: As Mary speaks, all disperse into their homes, scurrying into their beds, shivering, pulling up blankets, dreaming nightmares.

Mary: And they fled across the bridge, into their homes, into their cold beds, covering their heads with their thin blankets. Shivering, they fell into sleep as though into the cold Stour, they fell into dreams of bells tolling ... And then, in the very first light of day, even before the Miller noticed his cart was not where he'd left it, along comes the Knowlton gang, peering and poking into the river.

Knowlton Villagers appear cautiously. They speak.

Villager 1: Something shiny's down there, looks slippery and cold.
Villager 2: Probably one of those drowned water rats, those Stur thieves.
Villager 3: I hear a ringing, a strange ringing ...
Villager 4: You'll feel a ringing in your ears if you don't get that rope over the side quickly!
Villager 5: Quick, John, tie that rope round!
Villager 1: .. and then round!
Villager 2: .. and then round!
Villager 3: No, Keep away from me, I can't swim.
Villager 4: And I'm not getting into that cold hell!
Villager 5: Jack, in you go and tie it round the ring at the top end.
Villager 1: And pull ...

All: Heave and pull!

Action: Villagers, in a horizontal line across the performance area, mime pulling the Bell up from the river. All collapse as the rope breaks. Action is repeated again and again, including during the following speech, to show repeated attempts failing over and over.

Mary (*knowingly*): And over and over the ropes break, new ropes and old ropes, the Stur Rats' ropes and the Knowlton gang's ropes, for years and years they break and the Bell lies asleep in its new element. Where it lies now – still.

Sound of distant bell.

Mary: A bell is a charm against the Evil Eye and it should never be harmed. But still it lives, sometimes it stirs. As long as the good folks of hereabouts do utter these immortal words:

All cast chant in unison.

All: “Knowlton Bell is stole and thrown into White Mill hole.
All the devils in Hell could never pull up Knowlton Bell”

Older Joyce and Norah cross from opposite sides of the audience to meet in the centre of the grassy area. Others gradually disperse through the audience.



Scene 7: Norah's Story of the Flood and the Cats

Norah and Older Joyce meet on the grassy area between the Mill and the bridge.

Older Joyce: There's one more story to be told. A story of the beginning of the end.

Norah: But there's no more bread left, Master Harry.

Older Joyce: But the baker of the Storybread is here! You, Norah, creator of feasts fit for kings, soother of all manner of wounds and hurt feelings and lover of cats! There were always at least a dozen and on wet days half the tribe would be found seated around the kitchen fire.

SFX: Children make sounds of cats mewing.

Action: Norah, on hearing them, walks towards the door of the Mill, taking the audience with her. Older Joyce follows.

Norah: Oh, my darlings!

The story starts when the audience has gathered around the Mill.

Norah: The cats were kept because of all the rats and mice that infested the Mill. They had their own special room just next to the old Mill. Now floods were common in winter, of course, and sometimes so deep and of such long duration we were cut off from the rest of the world for several days. It was during a particularly severe flood that I was awakened one night by the piteous mewing of my beloved cats.

Action: Cats mewing all around. Lights on in Mill house.

Norah: I lit my candle and went downstairs through the little glass-roofed passage. But when I got there, I found it was foot deep in water. What could I do? I hoisted up my nightgown and stepped into the muddy cold flood.

Action: Norah acts out walking through the flood.

Norah: The cats' room was at a lower level than the passage and when I reached the door and opened it, I saw the poor moggies seated in a bunch on a table and yowling for all they was worth! The table careered swiftly around the room, carried along by a great eddy and bumping against the walls as it twirled and

rocked on its course. I watched my opportunity and grabbed one of the cats as the table passed the doorway. Then I waded back along the passage and deposited the frightened creature on the hearthrug in the kitchen.

Action: Norah repeatedly lifts up each of the children and carries them to the Mill. Frightened mewling from the children. Norah goes into the Mill after them.

Older Joyce: It took Norah over an hour to rescue all those cats and then she first made up the fire for their further comfort before herself retiring to warm her own legs for an hour beneath the bedclothes before she rose again to carry out her daily duties.

Norah (*coming out of the Mill*): Bread to bake! But that flood was bad!

They are joined by Gran, Daisy, Rose, Young Joyce, Cressida and Mary and all gather by the door of the Mill.

Gran: And, of course, it was a flood that finished the old Mill, wasn't it, Mr Joyce?

Older Joyce: Yes, indeed.

Gran: It ceased to be a water mill in 1865.

Older Joyce: Long before I was born! My father powered it with steam.

Daisy: I wish I could remember historical dates like you, Gran. Then I could pass my history exams just like that!

Gran: I always loved history, Daisy, dear. Loved the thought of all those who came before us. Who stepped on this soil. The dramas of kings, of queens, of knaves and millers ...

Rose: And millers' sons!

Daisy: And daughters!

Rose: And monstrous crabs creeping along lanes!

Daisy: And sunken bells still tolling in the bottom of rivers!

Norah: All grist to the mill. All been here, seen the wheel turning, rose on up high to the top of the old mill, and came back down. Ground to dust by the mill wheel of life.

Gran: But still here, still here. As long as we remember to imagine, Daisy, Rose, then the stories will live. Here. This very place. So very changed. Always here, always now, but always then too.

Pause.

Norah: Come, my dears, it's late. Time for some of us to say "Farewell".

Older Joyce, Young Joyce, Mary and Cressida go to Norah in turn and they embrace before exiting at the side of the Mill. Cressida makes an attempt to upstage Mary, who "tuts" loudly.

Norah: And now we must go back one more time, through the Mill. Follow me.

Norah, followed by Gran, Daisy and Rose, leads the audience through the Mill. She greets them as they emerge through the back door and directs them to the front of the Mill where the entire cast is assembled.

Finale: The Miller is seen standing on the bridge singing, accompanied by the cast.

Song (*sung as a round*): Flow, flow, flow,
 The water is
 Leaving the Mill,
 Under the bridge,
 On to the ocean.

All bow when the last of the audience has left the Mill.

The End