

# **The Wreckers**

## **Synopsis**

### **ACT I**

In a remote coastal village in Cornwall, the church congregation, led by Pastor Pascoe, laments the dearth of shipwrecks, upon which the village's population depends for their sustenance. This odd circumstance is clarified when Lawrence and his daughter Avis report to the crowd that someone has been lighting a beacon to warn the ships away from the rocks. These villagers are "wreckers," deliberately causing shipwrecks in order to loot the cargo. Under Pascoe's guidance, they pursue their occupation as an act of religious faith.

When Pascoe's young wife Thirza enters, she is greeted with suspicion, especially by Avis. Avis resents Thirza because of her relationship with Mark, Avis's former lover. Avis takes advantage of the moment to imply strongly to Pascoe that his wife is not to be trusted, and to suggest to the other wreckers the idea that Pascoe is weak, led about on a leash by Thirza. It is only a short distance from Avis's description to her conclusion that it must be Pascoe who is lighting the warning beacon at Thirza's behest. The consternation of the villagers is interrupted by the announcement that a ship is driving toward the rocks, and all break out in a wild dance at the thought of an imminent wreck.

### **ACT II**

Down by the shore, beneath the cliffs, Avis and Jack (who loves Avis), search for the one who has betrayed the wreckers. Mark observes them covertly. When they depart, Mark is joined by Thirza, who begs him not to light the fire that serves as a warning beacon. She tells him that the wreckers know someone is deliberately saving the ships, and even now they are searching for him. But Mark's determination encourages her, and the fire is lit. But at that very moment, as the light falls on Thirza's face, Pascoe appears on the edge of the cliff and recognizes her with horror.

Moments later, Avis and the other wreckers find Pascoe, unconscious by the burning embers.

### ACT III

In a cave by the sea, the congregation gathers to discuss their apparent betrayal by their own preacher, but Pascoe refuses to say a word in his own defense. The congregation, increasingly agitated by his silence, determines to kill him, but is stopped by the sudden appearance of Mark, who assumes responsibility for the warning beacons. Avis frantically tries to convince the crowd that Mark is not the culprit, and that he was with her during the night. But she is cast out by Lawrence, who then reminds everyone of what was done the last time a traitor was found among the wreckers. Traitors must die, drowned in the cavern as the tide comes in.

Pascoe suddenly speaks up, begging them not to kill Thirza, but the sentence has been passed. The congregation departs, Pascoe last and reluctantly. Mark and Thirza embrace, professing their love as the cavern fills with water.

## ACT I

### Scene 1

*A Cornish Village on a cliff above the sea. In the background, a grey stone Wesleyan Chapel. To the left a tavern with stone benches and tables; to the right Pascoe's cottage. Nearby, an overturned keel and hanging fishing nets. In the distance, the sea with a lighthouse just visible.*

*The chapel bell rings and the congregation approaches, singing a hymn. It is about five o'clock on a Sunday afternoon.*

#### **Congregation**

God's chosen people shall not pay the price of sin!  
For Jordan's wave hath washed them white.  
At heaven's golden gate behold them enter in,  
and dwell forever in the heavenly light.  
Alleluia! Alleluia!  
Praise ye the Lord, the King of might!

*Tallan and Jack come out of the tavern.*

#### **Tallan**

Stop lads! This is the stuff for putting the devil to flight! Naught kindles the fire of zeal like wine, no better aid to prayer than beer!

*Jack fills up the glasses.*

#### **Congregation**

If that be so, turn on the tap!

#### **Harvey**

On God's holy day you ply them with beer! Think of Pascoe's words, "drink not on the Sabbath!"

#### **Tallan**

You may drink in peace! Pascoe has gone on a journey, and a stranger will preach today! Fill your glasses like men, and if he chide you brave his wrath!

*A gust of wind; a shutter bangs.*

**Harvey**

God be thanked! What if luck should turn tonight!

**Tallan**

Blow, wind, from the South and save our children's lives!  
Drive some ship on the rocks.

**Harvey, Tallan**

Bring us food or we die!

**Congregation**

Haste to the shore, the storm is nigh,  
the breakers roar, the seabirds cry!  
Wreckers awake! For luck has come!  
What sound was that?  
Some ship upon the rocks has struck—  
Some gallant ship has come to port,  
striking the rocks with noise of thunder,  
quick, ere she founder, half in the plunder!  
O wreckers haste to the shore, for luck has come!  
Yonder cask in the breakers swimming,  
broach it quick! Let the tankards brimming  
pour fire and love in veins grown cold!  
Bracelets and chains for Sunday wearing,  
golden rings, jewels past comparing...  
Doubloons and Spanish sequins hard and gleaming...  
Haste ye! Haste, haste, haste to the shore!  
The storm is nigh, the breakers roar, the seabirds cry!  
Wreckers awake and haste ye. For luck has come!

*Pascoe enters; all put their tankards down with signs of embarrassment.*

**Scene 2**

**Pascoe**

Well may such as ye hang your heads in shame.  
Heathen!  
Drinking on His very threshold! His Sabbath profaned!  
O fools!

But God hath hardened your hearts,  
ears have ye and hear not!  
Then go your ways since ye heed me not!

*He turns to go.*

I cannot come to chapel. A dying sinner needs me.

**Harvey**

Nay, if thou leave us to our sins who shall save us?

**Congregation**

Our guide, our Shepherd art thou! And wilt thou leave us?

**Pascoe**

Hear then!  
Our nets are empty, barren the land,  
and the sharp tooth of hunger rends us!  
No foundering ship casts wealth on our strand,  
neither calm nor storm befriends us!

**Congregation**

God help us!

**Pascoe**

This people hath forgot the Lord, and He,  
who once bade the ocean feed us,  
now guides the tall ships safely past our shores!

*He walks away slowly.*

**Congregation**

'Tis thus we pay the price of sin!

**Harvey, Congregation**

The curse of Heaven doth on us lie,  
our God is wrath and we must die.  
O Lord, have mercy and hear our cry!

### Scene 3

*Pascoe departs as Lawrence and Avis enter. The latter looks after Pascoe and bursts into laughter.*

**Avis**

Ha! Ha! Ha!

*The people look at Avis disapprovingly.*

Did the prophet say that God in His anger is guiding the ships  
safe past our shore, that we because of our sins must perish?  
Ran the sermon thus?

**Congregation**

It was thus he spake!

**Avis**

Since ye believe his word is gospel, and are but clay formed to  
his hand...Father, let them be fooled no longer, but say what  
your own eyes have seen!

*Lawrence steps forward unwillingly, a group forms around him.*

**Lawrence**

Last evening when my work was ended,  
homeward at length I took my way.  
My heart was sad, my nets were empty,  
grimly I strode across the bay.  
I scanned the cliff's uplifted crest,  
the sea at its stern feet foaming,  
Then, O comrades, guess what I saw  
as I peered aloft in the gloaming!

**Congregation**

Say, oh say!

**Lawrence**

There blazed a fire bearing a message to ships,  
that must steer the rocks—but for yonder beacon of warning!  
In our midst a traitor doth hide!

**Congregation**

On his track! Up and hunt him to death, the vermin!

**Lawrence**

While I, poor fool, my lighthouse tending, put out the lamp when  
storms are raging, risk my neck in doing my duty, treacherous  
hands are firing beacons!

**Lawrence, Congregation**

While he puts out the lighthouse lamp, risking his neck for the  
sake of duty, traitor's hands are warning the tall ships off  
Cornwall's rocky shores! When he is caught, O joy to hang him!

**Tallan**

'Tis strange! Methinks my ears deceive me!

**Harvey**

Most strange! *(To Lawrence)* Did the knave leave a clue?

**Avis**

No! But I can tell you his name!

**Lawrence**

Child! No more! Most grave is the charge, a life at stake,  
and honor to lose. 'Twere sin to speak! Naught is yet proven!

**Congregation**

Let who brings the charge bring the proof!

**Avis**

Speak thus to men! We women ask no proof! We know!

### Scene 4

*Lawrence suddenly signals to the crowd to end the conversation.  
Thirza enters. All avoid her markedly. She walks slowly to the cottage,  
takes out a key and unlocks the door.*

**Harvey**

Here comes Thirza to join in our prayers!

**Thirza**

Your prayers and mind blend but ill!

**Harvey**

Hear the saucy jade insult us!

**Tallan**

Pascoe cannot come to chapel!

And when the cat's away  
the mouse, if a young one, will play!

**Jack, Tallan, Harvey, Avis, Congregation**

Though unworthy we may be, yet come and join us Thirza!

Join your prayers with ours!

Lest pride should have a fall come join us!

**Thirza**

I rank not like you with the godly. Pray among yourselves!  
My lips will not echo prayers such as yours.

*She enters the cottage and shuts the door violently.*

**Congregation**

You hear her—she mocks us. Our church scorned!

There goes the bell, 'tis the last one!

*The crowd quickly passes into the chapel;*

*Lawrence stands thoughtfully gazing at Pascoe's house.*

*Harvey and Tallan linger, and finally approach Lawrence.*

**Tallan**

Tell me comrade, have you a clue, or was it fancy?

**Lawrence**

Guard, Lord, the door of our lips,  
lest we should wrong a blameless man!

**Congregation** *(in the chapel)*

Our scarlet sins are white as snow.

**Lawrence**

Clue there is none!

*Lawrence, Tallan, and Harvey go into the chapel.*

*Avis gazes eagerly up the sea-road, while Jack hovers around her.*

## Scene 5

**Mark** *(in the distance)*

The wind is cold, the sky is sad,  
and wet my brow with drops of rain.

**Jack**

Please may I sit at your side in chapel?

**Avis**

Yes, but do not wait!

**Mark**

The first true love that ever I had  
in yonder wood lies fondly slain!

*Mark enters, carrying fish in a basket.*

I will do for the love I bare him  
all that fair young maiden may,  
sit beside his grave and mourn him  
twelve months and yet a day!

*Mark deposits his basket at the tavern, and then approaches Thirza's house.  
He throws a flower in the window.*

**Avis**

He has thrown her a flower!

**Mark**

I'll sit beside his grave and mourn him  
twelve months long, and yet a day!

**Avis**

Maybe he is but playing and loves me still!

**Mark**

Mourn beside his grave twelve long months and yet a day!

*Avis comes forward.*

**Avis**

Good day! 'Tis thus you keep your word?

**Mark**

What did I promise and when?

**Avis**

To fetch me but in vain I waited!

**Mark**

I forgot.

**Avis**

Take heed Mark, remember the wise old saw:

"Guard what is thine, lest thou lose it."

Fleeting is a maiden's favor,

and her fancy hard to bind!

Heart's will often go a-straying,

and there is a little saying

laggard lovers should bear in mind:

"Guard what is thine, lest thou lose it!"

I could tell you of a maiden,

scarce a man but has wooed her,

when she trips along the street, see,

the fisher lads surround her!

Every heart is at her feet!

Swains, have a care lest you lose her!

"Dost ask, love, a heart as token? Here is mine!

A bud from the stem fresh broken? It is thine!

Sun, moon, and stars at a word are thine alone!"

But to all this cruel maiden cries, "Begone!"

One there was on whom she smiled,

but cruelly he crossed her!

Then another suitor came

asked the maid to change her name!

Dumb was her first love! So he lost her!

**Mark**

Child, though my words give pain they must be said;

once I loved you but alas! that love is dead;

cold mists from the ocean have chilled the warmth of my day,

on my heart have laid an icy hand and love has left me!

**Avis**

When did the new love supplant me?

**Mark**

I know not what you mean.

**Avis**

Farewell! Your secret I can guess!

**Mark**

Secret there is none! The dearest child on Earth

gave her love to one of small worth,

and sorrow came to the child,

till one fine day she smiled,

for lo! In her heart fresh flowers had bloomed!

The service has begun—we're late! You are not coming?

**Avis**

No!

### Scene 6

*Mark enters the chapel. Avis stares wildly after him, and then suddenly points her finger as though she sees a rat.*

#### Avis

Ha! Ha! Ha! The rat's in sight!  
Ha! Ha! Ha! The rat shows fight!  
Smite her, kill her dead! Smite her!  
See her run—bravely done—she's dead!  
Her blood flows red!  
Ha! Ha! Ha! My heart is sore, so sore.  
Pit pat hear it beating, madly beating  
as stricken heart ne'er beat before!  
Take O Death my greeting!  
Break, heart! 'Tis beating no more!

*She drops on a bench and buries her face in her arms, sobbing violently.*

### Scene 7

*Thirza backs out of her cottage dragging nets to be hung for mending, not perceiving Avis, who hastily dries her eyes.*

#### Avis

'Tis she! Ah, she is wearing his flower!

#### Thirza

I will do for the love I bore him  
all that fair young maiden may.  
Sit beside his grave and mourn him  
twelve long months and yet...(suddenly noticing Avis)  
How strange you look!  
Your cheeks are as pale as ashes, unshed tears in your eyes!

#### Avis

I am tired, in sitting here I injure no one  
save those who wish to oust me!

#### Thirza

Go or stay as you please!

*Thirza returns to her nets. Avis strolls off, humming with indifference.*

#### Avis

Tra la la la!

#### Thirza

O Love!  
Love, O thou shaft of gold,  
bright ray from a dark cloud streaming,  
pierce through the cold clinging mist, and shine in my soul!  
Love, with sword sharp and gleaming,  
drive timid hearts toward the goal!  
Though sorrow thy guerdon and shame,  
seek through the world till thou find me!  
What if the dark wings of night  
like shadowy portals close behind me?  
In life and death thy strong cord shall bind me!  
Love, I weeping wait and long for thee! I weep and long!

### Scene 8

*Pascoe enters, grasping Avis by the arm. He points to the chapel.*

#### Pascoe

Yonder lies the house of God!  
(to Thirza)  
And you! At work on the Sabbath!

*Thirza drags the nets into the house again. He turns back to Avis.*

To your prayers! Yet ere ye seek the throne of grace  
take off and hand me that bauble! (points to her necklace)

#### Avis

No!

#### Pascoe

Our children are starving and your pastor commands you!  
This chain will be sold for the poor man's need!

*Avis throws the necklace on the ground.*

**Avis**

Then take it and may ill luck go with it!  
 If wearing jewels is a crime  
 some wives do worse things in secret!  
 And husbands, though blind,  
 come to know in time!  
 When the good old man is working,  
 a young wife prefers to play;  
 should a handsome fellow meet her,  
 can you grumble if he greet her  
 in a friendly sort of way?  
 Poor old man—why don't he beat her?

*Laughing, Avis scornfully goes into the chapel.*

**Pascoe**

Is that stubborn child lost on evil paths?  
 Keep her pure from sin, O merciful Savior!

*Thirza meanwhile comes out of the house  
 and stands moodily, staring in front of her.*

**Scene 9****Pascoe**

I thought to have found you in the chapel.

**Thirza**

Who seeks there will seek me in vain!

**Pascoe**

What is this? Child! Are you dreaming?

**Thirza**

It is enough! No more will my voice join yours in prayer,  
 unless to pray God may not hear you!

**Pascoe**

Not join our prayers? May God forgive you!  
 The wild beast in the forest is free, free are the angels.

But man is born in bond of law!  
 What are our misdeeds  
 that with the brethren Thirza will not pray?

**Thirza**

Yea, though your deeds be writ in tears and blood,  
 ye be the Saints, the Chosen of God!  
 Such may steal, 'tis but taking tithe!  
 If blood be shed, God's will be done!  
 Blood quenches the thirst of his children!  
 Your psalms and prayers my soul abhors!  
 If 'tis thus the Chosen serve him, would ye were heathen!

**Pascoe**

Whatsoe'er the wild ocean brings us,  
 born hither at the Lord's command,  
 is ours by right, as 'twas our fathers!  
 Such is the custom of our land.

**Thirza**

Ah, me! Could I fly these cruel shores!  
 The dead, cold and stark beneath the waters,  
 come to me at nightfall and haunt my slumbers.  
 My daily bread tastes of blood and I quail  
 when the wind is rising!

**Pascoe**

Wake, wake! And banish these foolish dreams!

**Thirza**

Murderers!  
 The hunter recks not of mercy  
 as he cheers his hounds on their prey.  
 Thus leagued with night and tempest,  
 ye ruthless fiends urge Death to seize and slay!

*Beside herself, Thirza seems to take part in the scene she describes.*

No landing back into the sea with them!  
Then out with your daggers!  
For only the dead keep silence!

*She appears to draw a knife and lean over an imaginary figure.*

Thou whose eyes are glazing thus I seal them!

*She strikes with the knife.*

Men, women, children spare none, let no one escape you!

**Congregation** *(in the chapel)*

Up Lord our God! Avenge thy name!  
And whet thy sword our foes to smite!  
Their hosts overwhelm, their bones consume!  
Let all the Earth proclaim thy might!

**Thirza**

Feed thy Saints with the flesh of their brethren!  
Amen! Praise the Lord!

*Thirza tries to rush away, but Pascoe stops her.*

**Pascoe**

These are the words of one distraught  
but the hand of Satan is on thee! Answer not—  
keep silence and hear.  
Mid wild rocks dwelling, where no man may sow nor reap,  
God bid our harvest grow on the breast of the deep.  
Said he, "with grateful heart take what the ocean sendeth,  
yon ships your flock shall be that is way slowly wendeth,  
on t'ward the steaming cliffs, shambles set o'er the flood."  
In God's mighty name we shed blood!  
In days of old by the faithful his foes were slaughtered,  
yea, till with rain of blood smiling Canaan was watered!  
Nursed by stern beetling crag, comrade of wind and wave,  
well may our Cornish land breed a hard race, and brave!  
Strong in the spotless fame of the women that bore us,  
as were of old our sires before us!

**Congregation** *(in the chapel)*

Amen!

Our ransomed souls shall never taste of death!

**Pascoe**

Then dry those foolish tears, my child, my love!

*Pascoe lays his hand on Thirza's shoulder.*

**Thirza**

Let me be! I loathe you!

*Thirza rushes out; Pascoe staggers backwards, stunned.*

## Scene 10

*The people come out of the chapel, fulsomely congratulating the preacher.*

**Lawrence, Harvey**

Ah! Thus should the Word be preached!

**Congregation**

Ah! Thus should the Word be preached!  
A fine discourse! I thought that Satan was come!  
I saw his horns and tail, felt a breath that scorched me.  
It is thus that the Word should be preached!  
Oh, what a saint he must be!  
Oh, how he shouted and thundered!  
I was convicted of sin! Broken and crushed, convicted of sin!  
I trembled! I shuddered! I trembled!  
O cleansing waters of Jordan, your work begin!  
Wash white our erring souls fresh convicted of sin.  
Rejoice ye saints for the day of the Lord is nigh!  
Mark how sinners quail, how they tremble and fly!  
Hiding in bush and cave, but old Satan will find them,  
and Hell's yawning gates close behind them!

*The congregation departs. Lawrence, Harvey, Tallan, and Jack remain behind. The sun begins to darken, storm clouds gather. Avis comes out of the chapel and stands near her father. Mark then comes out and approaches Avis. She turns her back on him; he shrugs and departs. Then two men come out; they lock the chapel and look up at the sky.*

**A Man**

Mark how strange the light is! That sky should bring us luck!

*The men depart. In the distance, thunder and lightning. Lawrence and the others look at Pascoe, who is still sitting on the bench, staring in front of him.*

**Lawrence**

He is lost in thought and hears not!

**Harvey**

Yea by heavenly visions his soul is charmed!

**Avis**

Or perchance some foreboding haunts him?

**Tallan**

Speak to him, comrades! I dare not!

**Jack**

How strange he looks!

**Lawrence**

Hi, Pascoe, dream no more!  
Awake! There will be work upon the shore!  
Foreign ships homeward bound are passing,  
dense is the mist and then waves roar!

**Pascoe**

Let by night a pillar of fire  
moving before us lighten our darkness...

**Avis**

A pillar of fire!

**Pascoe**

...lest from thy path our footsteps wander!

**Harvey**

The saint is lost in prayer, he sees us not nor hears, for his soul  
is steeped in a vision!

**Tallan**

A pillar of fire! Comrades did you hear? Of fire!

**Avis**

Father, did you hear? Of fire!

**Jack**

He spoke of a fire!

**Lawrence**

What of work for tonight? Your will is law, command us!

**Pascoe**

Do what e'er ye will! Begone and leave me alone  
on the shore with God...

**Scene 10**

*Avis follows Pascoe for a few steps, then turns abruptly to the others.*

**Avis**

The traitor is Pascoe!

**Harvey**

Are you mad, child?

**Avis**

'Tis he who betrays us! The man who warns off the ships is  
Pascoe himself!

**Harvey**

Rather say, foolish maiden, that the night is the day...

**Jack, Tallan, Lawrence**

Not so loud!

**Harvey**

...than that Pascoe our father would his children betray!

**Jack, Tallan, Lawrence**

Not so loud! Not so loud! Not so loud!

**Avis**

He is ruled by his wife, sole delight of his life,  
and an old man's desire is a fierce blazing fire.  
This stranger who judges and condemns us is young and fair!

**Harvey**

The jade is young and most fair!

**Avis**

Man's faith, when his love is in the balance  
weighs lighter than air!

**Harvey**

Man's faith is lighter than air!

**Tallan**

When we asked him to lead us he refused, turned away!

**Tallan, Jack, Lawrence, Harvey**

He never came to chapel and has shunned us all the day!

**Avis**

She turned from us his heart!

**Tallan, Jack, Lawrence, Harvey**

Sowed the seed!

**Avis**

It is Thirza who inspired him to the deed!

*Thirza appears in the background;  
unobserved, she listens awhile and then disappears.*

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey**

Who breaks our law must die!  
This night we three must watch him,  
find the beacon and catch him, lest his guilt he deny!

**Lawrence**

Let my beat be the Witches' Byre, likely spot for a beacon fire.

**Harvey**

Mine the rocks on Silver Beach.

**Tallan**

I take for my beat Smugglers Reach.

**Lawrence**

Hell Point needs a man whose nerve is aye steady!  
What about young Jack?

**Jack**

Here, ready!

**Lawrence**

Let our plan be thus:  
Take horns with you and blow now and again,  
to keep in touch,  
but if anyone catch sight of the beacon,  
let him blow his horn four times, loud blasts, and long!

**Lawrence**

He strove hard, maybe, to conquer her will, who can tell?

**Harvey**

He strove hard, maybe, to thwart her, who can tell?

**Tallan**

Who can tell?

**Harvey**

Who can tell?

**Lawrence**

But lust of the flesh prevailed, and he fell!

**Harvey**

But lust of the flesh prevailing he was tempted and fell!

**Avis**

'Tis the work of his wife—

**Avis, Tallan, Lawrence**

I would wager my life it is so!

**Harvey**

'Tis so!

**Avis, Tallan, Lawrence**

For an old man's desire is a fierce blazing fire as we know!

**Harvey**

The power of love we know!

*A man runs out blowing a horn, the congregation follows, some bearing arms.*

**Congregation**

A barque on the rocks is driving! Hip, hip, hurrah!

**Harvey**

Yonder ship will surely founder!

**Tallan, Lawrence**

White mist veils the shore, hides the warning breakers!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence**

Were the moon but younger, oh what a night for wreckers!

**All**

Shorewards haste, and help the stranger safe to land!  
Safe to land!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence**

Come one, come all, and join us!

*A wild dance begins. Ropes, hooks, axes and other wrecking tackle are brought from the tavern and handed round. The older men mount on the benches and strike up the hymn amid thunder and lightning.*

**Congregation**

Who's for the dance? Storm is wailing.  
Pale corpses on the wreckage sailing!  
Gleaming gold will line our barren shore.  
In Cornwall thus we pay the piper's score!

**All**

Blood and sea water mingle gladly,  
snow white and red the foam will glance.  
And the bread be dancing madly  
upon the platter while our daggers rising, falling dance!

**Lawrence, Harvey, Congregation**

Up then Jehovah, mighty God,  
the heathen smite and bend them 'neath thy rod.  
Up, Lord on God!

**Avis, Jack, Congregation**

Snow white and red the foam will glance,  
and on the platter bread is dancing,  
the while our gleaming daggers rising and falling  
a wild measure dance!

**Congregation**

On the platter the bread dances madly! Ha! Ha!  
At the flash of our daggers that stab as they dance!  
Come dancers! Dancers come join the dance!  
While the daggers flash,  
while the daggers are rising and falling, hurrah!  
Oh, come and join the dance! Ah!



## ACT II

### Scene 1

*A desolate part of the seashore; a high cliff rises with a rugged path leading up it; rocks and boulders, in the distance the sea.  
A moonlit night obscured by fog which gradually clears.*

**Jack** *(from a distance)*  
Stop knave! Stop knave!  
*(from the top of the cliff)*  
Caught at last!

*Jack scrambles down the cliff, landing with a thud.  
He looks around in astonishment.*

'Twas a ghost! He has vanished!  
Not a soul in sight far or near!  
Every where do I see him,  
now left, now right, then far, then near.  
This man they seek is safe in bed,  
the mist is gone, the night clear, ah me!

*Avis appears.*

What a fool am I, led, beguiled by her!

**Avis**  
Laggard, he has slipped through your hands!

**Jack**  
"Come," she says, "and walk along the shore!"  
Off I go and hope for something more.  
But oh if I venture near her, speak of the love I bear her,  
"There goes the traitor," she cries...

**Avis**  
He is angry!

**Jack**  
...and off like lightning she flies!

*Avis tries to take his arm; he pulls away.*

**Avis**  
Jack, I meant no harm! Forgive me, come take my arm.

**Jack**  
See, behind the rocks he is hiding,  
o'er the sand he is gliding! Jack you must run like the wind!  
Tired and hot? Never mind!

**Avis**  
Forgive me, I meant no harm.

**Jack**  
Our cliffs are steep and jagged are our stones.  
My clothes are ragged aching are my bones.

**Avis**  
Come give me an arm! Your arm!

**Jack**  
Midnight walks do not amuse me!  
All you do is abuse me!  
Running, jumping, climbing, sliding,  
falling on my head!  
My sole reward taunts and gibing!  
That being so, I'm for bed!

**Avis**  
I must soothe him for I need him.  
You say I have not thanked you?  
Thus I reply. Jack come near!

*She kisses him.  
Mark enters behind the rocks, where he remains hidden.*

**Avis**

Wicked boy to tease me!  
Stand still and hear what I had planned for, longed for.

**Jack**

Avis be kind and kiss me, kiss me!

**Avis**

Jack to hit upon the traitors track,  
Pascoe led in chains by little Jack!  
Jack the hero of the story!  
Avis to share the glory!  
Then let us start dodging and hiding  
over the shingle gliding!  
Sly as a fox and as fast,  
certain to catch him at last!

**Jack**

My heart beats for you alone!  
Avis, my darling, my own!  
Come for Jack will do his part,  
now dodging then hiding  
over the shingle gliding,  
sly as a fox and as fast,  
certain to catch him at last!

**Mark**

Ye Gods! 'Tis Jack with Avis all alone!  
He calls the child his own!  
I feared I had broken her heart!  
It seems I have played a foolish part!  
Far too gravely viewed the past,  
thought that love would last!

**Scene 2**

*Jack and Avis run off; Mark looks at them, smiling.*

**Mark**

Thus we come to know our worth! This maiden is but a child,  
yet children's woes are soon forgotten! Yet 'twas sad to see her  
weep, her little pride laid low, her love revealed!  
O vanity of men! The wound was slight, and soon healed!  
No dreaming! Once more our flame shall blaze and die!

*Mark collects from clefts in the rocks driftwood and rubbish, and an old tar barrel, and begins a bonfire, eventually singing as he builds it up.*

**Ballad of the Bones**

When wilt thou give me peace from vain desire?  
Since ne'er alas! My lover thou mayst be?  
"When thou thy gentle heart of gold tried by fire,  
thy fair body's treasure dost yield to me!"  
Though ne'er to sweet forbidden love consenting  
my heart is in thy keeping now, thine past return  
but my poor beauty I can mar unrelenting,  
so shall then perchance thy love less fiercely burn.  
'Twere vain, for seek thee, pursue thee I must,  
pursue thee with tireless ardor ne'er taking breath.  
And if thy flesh were joined to mine be dust  
then my bones at last shall clasp thy bones in death!

*He stops working and falls to dreaming.*

Ah could I but cease to be soul and body!  
My love could vanish like smoke as spent embers die,  
burn like these flames to sleep in silence,  
and sleeping forget no more be I.  
But e'en if to silence my pain thy token  
at length in the grave I prison it deep,  
at word from thy lips though 'twere softly spoken,  
at sound of thy step every chain would be broken  
and love would awake from death's long trance.  
Arise, as flowers in spring time awaken and rise from sleep!

### Scene 3

*Mark is about to light the fire when he hears Thirza's voice.*

**Thirza**

Mark! Not tonight! Mark!  
Light not the fire!

**Mark**

Thirza! 'Tis she at last! Come to me!

**Thirza**

Love I come, my arms open wide.  
At last to clasp thee!

**Mark**

At last to clasp thee!  
More sweet than rain to thirsty land,  
to see thy face, to hold thy hand!

**Thirza**

Oh, leaden hours since last mine eyes held thine,  
Since last thy lips were pressed to mine.  
But night is over, day doth shine!

**Mark**

Since last thy lips were pressed to mine.  
Our sun was hidden but lo!  
The night is over, day doth shine!

*They kiss.*

**Thirza**

And thus too may Heaven o'er dark places leading, our souls to  
prove!

**Mark**

Maybe that Heaven our souls would prove.

**Thirza**

Yet bid us our day, naught but our love's voice heeding!

**Mark**

All else unheeding—

**Thirza, Mark**

— live and die but for love!

*Thirza frees herself from his embrace.*

**Thirza**

Mark, you know not what wind blew me hither,  
what dark forebodings fill my heart,  
though in these dear arms terrors droop and wither,  
like ghosts at dawn depart!  
O doomed ones! Wanderers from far,  
over a strange sea sailing,  
even as bird by fowler lured to our shore!  
When the waves run high may kind Heaven guard you!  
Thirza's hand can help no more!  
Ne'er again our friendly flame shall greet you,  
laughing seawards by night and dancing for joy!

**Mark**

Has a spy betrayed us?

**Thirza**

Nay, 'twas evil chance led them to the spot where  
the ash yet glowed.

**Mark**

Their prey will escape yet!

**Thirza**

Stealing on his track swiftly through the night,  
the wild pack draws near.  
Hark! 'Tis their horn—they will find the last beacon!  
Will follow you! Come, linger not here!

**Mark**

Hounds of hell come one! Yet ere I am caught,  
in chains dragged along to swing on the crossway,  
once more o'er the wild dark sea shall thy banner float,  
one last message of mercy flaming,  
thy glorious flag stream o'er the sky, of night make day!

*Mark moves to light the torch, but Thirza holds him back.*

**Thirza**

Wouldst't thou light thy way then to death?

**Mark**

Nay! 'Tis my farewell! To Cornwall's shores in speech of fire  
I bid goodbye!

**Thirza**

Wilt thou forsake me, leave me here to weep alone,  
dragging my chain in silence, unblessed by love  
save his which is shame and anguish?

**Mark**

Nay, that is past. Cut off from thy dear love I were lost,  
in hell and lost! But since thou'rt mine, Thirza, soul and body,  
no more will I share thee, but rather slay thee!

**Thirza**

To love is to die, and new to awaken.  
I was but a child, my will hard to bend.  
Lo, the paths I wandered are now forsaken,  
and my heart's one pride to love, to love my friend!  
When the lark awakes and climbs into heaven,  
when the daylight falls and shadows descend,  
lapped close in sweet dreams from dawn unto evening,  
in silence my spirit communes with my friend!

**Mark**

Communes with my friend.

**Thirza**

The stars are alight, they tremble and quiver,  
like hearts at the message that love doth send.  
And down on my soul the kisses rain ever,  
kisses thrice divine from the soul of my friend!

**Mark**

Kisses thrice divine.

**Thirza**

To see thee I yearn, yet falter and fly thee,  
vainly striving yet my heart to defend.  
What should I withhold, what token deny thee?  
Thou, my life, my death, my lover, my friend.

*They hear the wreckers' horn in the distance.*

**Mark**

Thirza is it true? So dearly you love me?

**Thirza**

More than all the world, than God above me.

**Mark**

Then fly with me far o'er the sea to a happier land!

**Thirza**

Fly with you to a happier land?

**Mark**

A happier land.

**Thirza**

Mark, I dare not!

**Thirza, Mark**

Beloved, far o'er the sea there on sunlit shore,  
love shall join us to part never more!

**Thirza**

Oh, joy, o'er yonder sea to fly with my beloved, far from here!  
My weak heart fails me!

**Mark**

Thirza come!

*Again the horn sounds.*

**Mark**

Here thy work is done, thy travail of mercy!  
The hand that wrought for the doomed is chained to thy side!  
No more shall thy flame through the night lost wanderers guide!

**Thirza**

Helpless!

**Thirza, Mark**

O child, alone, all alone sad watches keeping,  
torn by love and despair, hopeless and weeping!

**Mark**

When full yonder moon is a ship doth sail, bears me far away,  
far o'er the sea. Ah, come! Thirza, come! She yields!

*Thirza picks up the torch and holds it out for Mark to kindle.*

**Thirza**

That barque be our fate! Dead soul awaken!  
Look not behind, the step is taken!  
What if women point in scorn and men deride?  
I care not, if my hero, my savior, be at my side!

**Mark**

Then burn withered branches!

**Thirza** *(brandishing the torch)*

Dead leaves bravely burn!

**Mark**

Stream abroad, wild pennon of fire!

**Thirza, Mark**

Stream from o'er the ocean!

Leap high, bold flame, stab the sky!

Leap high as our hearts and stab the dark sky!

Blaze, beacon! Blaze, fire of love in deathless splendor!

Brave the night and shine forbid through thy ray!

Conquer the gloom, flame fierce and tender!

Shine for the lost and light their way,  
shine forth and show the lost their way!

Hearts that have known sin, shame, and sorrow,

sad lovers, when the hour has come, fear naught!

Love is at your side!

Pilgrims are we, though dark looms the morrow,

at love's command we seek a far off land,

faring forth hand in hand

with love our guide!

*Unseen by Mark and Thirza, Pascoe appears on the cliff above.  
A moonbeam illuminates Thirza's face. Mark and Thirza depart.  
Pascoe stumbles down the path and falls senseless near the fire.*

**Pascoe**

Thirza!

**Scene 4**

*Lawrence, Harvey, Tallan, Avis and Jack enter and approach the fire,  
which is by now almost burned out. Lawrence kneels down  
and puts his hand on Pascoe's chest.*

**Lawrence**

Here lies a man.

**Harvey**

Is he dead?

**Lawrence**

No, he breathes yet.

*Tallan turns the light of his lantern on Pascoe's face.*

**Avis**

Father, this face ye know!

**Avis**

Ha! 'Tis Pascoe!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey, Jack**

God, 'tis Pascoe!



**ACT III**

**Scene 1**

*The interior of a huge cave, in the background, its narrow opening and beyond that the sea. There is a cleft on one side, furnished with an iron grate, with rough-hewn steps leading to the cliff above.*

*The congregation including Avis and Jack descend these steps.*

**Congregation**

Naught, and ever naught yea! Our fortune fails us.

Rumors are afloat of a traitor's work!

Some have talked of witchcraft, or the evil eye.

What help then avails us?

Naught and ever naught, fortune fails us.

Have you heard what is said?

That the cliff ever higher is lit by a fire,  
and thus we are betrayed!

'Twere a cowardly act! What are the proofs to show?

Who can swear to the fact? Is it certainly so?

These tales are but gossip, say I! And I, and I!

Mere tales handed round as a warning!

That it was rumored none deny! Nor I, nor I!

Chilly and sad the day is dawning.

The tide will flood the cave ere morning.

'Tis cold here! The dawn is chill and grey. 'Tis not yet day.

Say, why are we here in this cavern thronging?

Because the court was called at break of day.

*(A new group of people enter the cave.)*

Sadly moans the wind, bitter is the cold!

What is in the air, tell us if you can!

Death, and death by hanging!

Did you hear what they said? He was caught in the act

and the gossip is fact,

we are betrayed!

But who is the monster of hell?

The name Lawrence alone can tell us!

He followed and tackled him well.

We'll hang the knave who dared to sell us!

*Lawrence, Harvey, Tallan, and Pascoe enter.*

They come, they come!

Tell the news you have brought,

and whom you have caught.

**Lawrence**

Men here assembled, bound by secret oath,

here in this court let justice be done! 'Tis dark, light the torches.

**Avis**

Does she know that her pride will be humbled in the dust?

That here in this cave ere daybreak will be published

his shame and hers?

**Jack**

Does he know that his pride will be humbled,

his shame and hers?

**Pascoe**

"Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord, "is mine."

"Vengeance is mine."

**Congregation**

Curt and stern their speech, fraught with doom their looks!  
 Dawn is scarcely breaking, dark the shadows loom.  
 And the torches wink burning dimly, even as in a tomb.

**Lawrence**

Pray God for guidance and light!

*The men remove their hats.*

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey, Congregation**

Wandering Lord, in the night thy sheltering arm stretch over us,  
 guide thou our steps aright, guide thou our steps,  
 make plain thy way before us!

**Lawrence**

Since long weeks we are starving and vainly have prayed,  
 that some gold laden ship in our waters might founder;  
 proven are my words, this was traitor's work!  
 Last night on the shore we three found a beacon.

**Congregation**

Shame! Oh, shame!

**Lawrence**

The smoldering fire was scarce lit, and swooning beside it lay  
 Pascoe! We questioned him, but not a word would he reply!  
 Therefore I call the secret court! Command him, if such  
 your will be, to speak! Let all things be brought to the light!

**Congregation**

Yea! He must speak! Pascoe speak!

**Pascoe**

I am not one to whom his fellows give orders!  
 I march in front, by grace of God head of this flock;  
 thus my comrades have known me, thus I stand today!  
 Who thinks to bend my will, that man has yet to know me!

**Lawrence**

'Tis well! Hear your pastor, who has told us that God in wrath  
 has decreed that His people shall die. O cunning of the saint!  
 He himself is the traitor!

**Congregation**

Man thou art mad to believe it!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey**

Let him say, if he dare, what he did on the shore!

**Congregation**

Who shall stand if Pascoe should fail us?  
 Tell us why, what should tempt Pascoe to betray his flock?

**Lawrence, Harvey**

Yet he breaks not his silence!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan**

Lo! The prophet at bay!

**Avis**

This man betrayed his flock at the bidding of one who hates us,  
 whose humble slave, whose fool he is!  
 Yonder woman who rules his hearth, well we know her!  
 The apple of his eye! His child! His toy!  
 When Heaven sends us luck she curses,  
 and when our fortune fails she laughs for joy!  
 We kneel in prayer,  
 Thirza the pure will not join us!  
 Strange that a woman should disdain us  
 of whom some folks aver  
 Church is no place for her!  
 That prayers affright her, that bad deeds delight her!  
 Vile priestess of dark evil arts,  
 with magic true lovers she parts  
 and changes their hearts!

Rank poisonous philters in secret brewing  
their senses to be clouded like mists at night!  
Thus Pascoe, your saint, was lured and entangled and  
struggling in her toils at length betrays the right!  
Bid your holy prophet speak!  
Let him confess the crime or,  
lie on lips, face his creator!

**Harvey, Congregation**  
Pascoe, deny your guilt!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence**  
Yes, deny if you dare!

**Harvey, Congregation**  
Pascoe, deny your guilt!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence**  
Nay, he is guilty!

**Avis, Jack, Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey, Congregation**  
This man is guilty, shall die!

**Mark** (*appearing at the cave entrance*)  
Stay!

## Scene 2

**Mark**  
'Tis I who have betrayed you! This man has done no wrong!

*Pascoe straightens up and takes a menacing step toward Mark.*

**Pascoe**  
You, Mark! Why?

**Mark**  
You ask me why? E'en as one keeps the path,

so his comrade will stray and the cup must be drained,  
be it bitter or sweet.  
From horizons afar comes a voice that we needs must follow  
down a road that is strange to our feet.  
Lo! A fate unforeseen draws nigh, takes our hand,  
unforeseen fate draws nigh!  
Leads through flowering fields to a sunshiny land  
or by roads steep and stony to dark things unknown.  
What if the end be shame, or our brief day close in honor?  
Dreams! Idle dreams! Soon we shall all alike be sleeping  
our last long sleep in the earth or beneath water!  
(*To Lawrence*)  
Strike me down! Since 'tis the game!  
Like a dog, a mad dog, kill me! But know this!  
I glory in my crime to the last! Well I foresaw the end,  
well counted the cost. And unregretting pass,  
happy and proud, I die!

**Avis**  
Mad thou art! Mad who believes thee! Mark, take back thy  
word.

**Thirza**  
'Tis he who betrayed you! Mine is the guilt!

**Avis**  
Witch! Thou dost lie! None has he loved but me! His heart is  
mine! O friends believe not!

**Jack, Tallan, Harvey, Congregation**  
He himself has told us.

**Mark**  
I have told you.

**Avis**  
Nay! But I will speak!

**Jack, Tallan, Harvey, Congregation**

That he has done the deed!

**Mark**

'Twas I that did the deed!

**Avis**

I will speak or die! He swears he lit the fire, a lie, a foolish lie!  
And I can prove it! For Mark was with me,  
he is my lover, spent last night in my arms,  
stayed with me till dawn!

**Mark**

You are dreaming awake!

**Thirza**

Wild words flung in the air and none believes them! Your foolish  
boast could almost make me smile!

**Pascoe**

Wilt thou publish thy shame?

**Thirza**

No, child! His only love am I!

**Mark**

Come, beloved! Welcome death, death who shall join us!  
Shall your God be judge!

**Thirza**

Torn by wolves he found me on his breast he tended,  
healed me, 'twixt ye and me, O murderers. God be judge!

**Pascoe**

Woe is me! Love and honor are lost!

**Jack, Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey**

Here in our midst, alas this sin!

**Congregation**

Shameless one, false and faithless!

Silence her lest she pollute us!

**Avis**

Kill them! Kill! Kill the man and his whore!

*Lawrence seizes Avis and violently flings her toward the opening of the cave.*

**Lawrence**

Lest that same doom on thine own head fall, begone!  
Thou art my child no more!

*Avis departs weeping, followed by Jack.*

**Congregation**

Hark the rising tide.

**Lawrence**

Years ago a comrade was accused of this crime, his black guilt  
proved, and here in this cave they left him to die; the sea rising  
engulfed him. Methinks you can guess why now ere the tide be  
full I hold court in this cavern?

**Congregation**

We understand!

**Lawrence**

Tell me now if it be your will that this shall be the fate  
of these who have conspired against their brethren,  
adulterers and traitors?

**Congregation**

It is our will! Thus let them die!

**Tallan, Harvey, Congregation**

Closed is the course and sealed the doom  
of those who have stolen our children's bread  
and defiled the hearth where pure married love held its rites!

The gulls' mournful cry, wailing high o'er the waves,  
pierce their ears like a curse!  
Our sharp Cornish rocks tear their flesh,  
rend their vile members asunder,  
and thus shall their name pass from our land!

**Pascoe**

Nay! Die she shall not! Comrades, spare her! 'Tis but a child!

**Thirza**

I ask to die—

**Pascoe**

Thou art not fit! Turn and repent thee from fire sempiternal,  
go save thy soul!

**Thirza**

Think ye that I repent? When up the hill the stream be flowing  
or dead wood green with sap hath proved,  
then see my heart repentance showing  
that I have lived, that I have loved!  
Ere that shall be, though your curses thunder,  
though I be lost, cast to vultures a prey,  
in the pride of love's great wonder  
I would yield to that love here today!  
Here 'neath your eyes to his love would yield today!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Congregation**

Shall such as these find mercy?  
Who spake of mercy? Nay, 'twere sin to spare her!

**Pascoe**

Here with your lover death shall not find you!

**Congregation**

She has scorned and defied us,  
repents not, then leave her here to die!

**Pascoe**

Not here!

*Pascoe tries to drag Thirza out of the cave; she resists,  
while Mark struggles with the men holding him as he tries to aid her.*

**Thirza**

If you drag me hence, part my dear love and me...

**Congregation**

Leave her!

**Thirza**

...my last dying curse, like a bolt of flame,  
shall strike this land—lay low you and your children!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey**

Leave!

**Pascoe** (still holding Thirza)

Come!

**Thirza** (raising her arms to heaven)

Thou before whom I shall soon appear!

**Congregation**

Fast the tide is rising!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey**

Loose her, leave her!

**Congregation**

Enough! Blaspheme not!

**Thirza**

In hell or in high heaven give ear!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey**

Loose her!

**Congregation**

Enough! Release her!

**Pascoe**

With thy last breath, breathe not those words accursed,  
but die, die as thou wilt, O thou lost one!

*Pascoe lets Thirza go and departs with unsteady step.  
The sea gradually rises into the cavern.*

**Lawrence**

Now in solemn cadence, sing the psalm for the passing of souls,  
and may God show them mercy!

**Congregation**

Hark the trump of doom! Lo! The dreadful day!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey, Congregation**

Earth and Heaven pass, shrinking like a parched scroll  
In the angel's hand see the balance sway  
Weighted and rejected soul after soul!

**Thirza**

On me, whose lonely tears thou sawest,  
on him whose pitying hand sought mine,

**Thirza, Mark**

On all sinners who have sinned through love,  
shed the mercy of love divine!

**Tallan, Lawrence, Harvey, Congregation**

Too late, 'tis too late!

**Mark**

Turn on me those eyes full of sea and sky where in death  
undying love will shine!

**Thirza**

Sweet heart all is vain save thy love and mine!

**Thirza, Mark**

Now we two, O bliss, may die together! Victory!

**Congregation**

Hark the trump of doom! Lo! The dreadful day!

**Thirza, Mark**

Soon mouth to mouth we two shall be sleeping  
as so oft we longed in vain to sleep!

**Congregation**

It is too late!

**Thirza**

Hear the bridal song, see the wild waves leap,  
herald of the kiss that ends no more!

**Mark**

High sweet voices of the wind wail and quiver,  
spirits rise that sing and dance as they soar.

**Thirza**

Below them the ocean's mighty roar...

**Thirza, Mark**

Like an organ whose loud thunderous peal  
rolls echoing on for aye!

*A wave crashes into the cavern.*

Sun! Light our dying! Sea, on thy breast bear us!  
Our last ecstasy thy embrace O sea!

**END**

