

PETER GRIMES

Libretto

by Montague Slater

27th May 2018

PROLOGUE

Interior of the Moot House, arranged as for a coroner's inquest. The coroner, Mr Swallow, is at a table on the dais, with the clerk at a table below. A crowd of townspeople in the body of the hall is held back by Hobson acting as constable. Mr Swallow is the leading lawyer of the Borough, and at the same time its mayor and coroner. A man of unexceptionable career and talents, he nevertheless disturbs the burgesess by his air of a man with an arriere pens.

Hobson

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!
(*Peter Grimes steps forward from among the crowd.*)

Swallow

Peter Grimes, we are here to investigate the cause of death of your apprentice William Spode, whose body you brought ashore from your boat, The Boy Billy, on the 26th ultimo. Do you wish to give evidence?

(*Peter nods.*)

Will you step into the box. Peter Grimes. Take the oath. After me. "I swear by Almighty God."

Peter

"I swear by Almighty God."

Swallow

"That the evidence I shall give."

Peter

"That the evidence I shall give."

Swallow

"Shall be the truth."

Peter

"Shall be the truth."

Swallow

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Peter

"The whole truth and nothing but the truth."

Swallow

Tell the court the story in your own words.

(*Peter is silent.*)

You sailed your boat round the coast with the intention of putting in to London. Why did you do this?

Peter

We'd caught a huge catch, too big to sell here.

Swallow

And the boy died on the way?

Peter

The wind turned against us, blew us off our course. We ran out of drinking water.

Swallow

How long were you at sea?

Peter

Three days.

Swallow

What happened next?

Peter

He died lying there among the fish.

Swallow

What did you do?

Peter

Threw them all overboard, set sail for home.

Swallow

You mean you threw the fish overboard?...When you landed did you call for help?

Peter

I called Ned Keene.

Swallow

The apothecary here?

(*indicates Ned*)

Was there anybody else called?

Peter

Somebody brought the parson.

Swallow

You mean the rector, Mr Horace Adams?
(The Rector steps forward. Swallow waves him back.)

All right, Mr Adams.
(He turns back to Peter.)

Was there a certain amount of excitement?

Peter

Bob Boles started shouting.

Swallow

There was a scene in the village street from which you were rescued by our landlady?

Peter

Yes. By Auntie.

Swallow

We don't call her that here.... You then took to abuse the respectable lady.

(Peter glares.)

Answer me.... You shouted abuse at a certain person?

Mrs Sedley pushes forward. Mrs Sedley is the widow of a retired factor of the East India Company and is known locally as 'Mrs Nabob'. She is 65, self-assertive, inquisitive, unpopular.

Mrs Sedley

Say who! Say who!! Say who!

Swallow

Mrs Sedley here.

Peter

(fiercely)

I don't like interferers.

A slight hubub among the spectators resolves itself into a chorus which is more like the confused muttering of a crowd than something fully articulate.

Chorus

When women gossip the result
 Is someone doesn't sleep at night.

Hobson

(shouting)

Silence!

Swallow

Now tell me this. Who helped you carry the boy home? The schoolmistress, the widow, Mrs Ellen Orford?

Women's Chorus

O when you pray, you shut your eyes
 And then can't tell the truth from lies.

Hobson

(shouts)

Silence!

Swallow

Mrs Orford, as the schoolmistress, the widow, how did you come into this?

Ellen

I did what I could to help.

Swallow

Why should you help this kind of fellow - brutal, callous, and coarse?

(to Grimes)

There's something here perhaps in your favour. I am told you rescued the boy from drowning in the March storms.

(Peter is silent.)

Have you something else to say?

No? - Then I have.

Peter Grimes. I here advise you - do not get another boy apprentice. Get a fisherman to help you - big enough to stand up for himself. Our verdict is - that William Spode, your apprentice, died in accidental circumstances. But that's the kind of thing people are apt to remember.

Chorus

But when the crowner sits upon it

Who can dare to fix the guilt?

Hobson

(shouts)

Silence! Silence!

Peter has stepped forward and is trying to speak.

Peter

Your honour! Like every other fisherman I have to hire an apprentice. I must have help -

Swallow

Then get a woman to help you look after him.

Peter

That's what I want - but not yet -

Swallow

Why not?

Peter

Not till I've stopped people's mouths.
(*The hubub begins again.*)

Swallow

(*makes a gesture of dismissal*)
Stand down! Clear the court.
Clear the court!

Peter

(*shouting excitedly against the hubub chorus*)
Stand down you say. You wash your hands.
The case goes on in people's minds
The charges that no court has made
Will be shouted at my head.
Then let me speak, let me stand trial,
Bring the accusers to the hall.
O let me thrust into their mouths,
The truth itself, the simple truth.
The truth itself!

Chorus

When women gossip, the result
Is someone doesn't sleep at night,
But when the crowner sits upon it,
Who can dare to fix the guilt?

Swallow

Clear the court.

Swallow rises with slow dignity. EVERYBODY stands up while he makes his ceremonial exit. The crowd begins to go out. Peter and Ellen are left alone.

Peter

The truth - the pity - and the truth.

Ellen

Peter, Peter, come away!

Peter

Where the walls themselves
Gossip of inquest.

Ellen

But we'll gossip, too,
And talk and rest.

Peter

While Peeping Toms
Nod as you go.
You'll share the name
Of outlaw, too.

Ellen

Peter, we shall restore your name.
Warmed by the new esteem
That you will find.

Peter

Until the Borough hate
Poisons your mind

Ellen

There'll be new shoals to catch:
Life will be kind.

Peter

Ay! only of drowning ghosts:
O, Time will not forget:
The dead are witness
And Fate is Blind.

Ellen

Unclouded,
The hot sun
Will spread his rays around
Your voice out of the pain,
Is like a hand
That I can feel, that I can feel
Here is a friend
Here is a friend.

They walk off slowly as the CURTAIN FALLS.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Street by the sea: Mote Hall exterior with its outside staircase, next door to which is The Boar. ned Keene's apothecary shop is at the street corner. On the other side, breakwaters run down to the sea. It is morning, before high tide, several days later. Two fishermen are turning the capstan, hauling in their boat. Prolonged cries as the boat is hauled ashore. Women come from mending nets to take the fish baskets from other fishermen who now disembark. Captain Balstrode sits on the breakwater looking out to sea through his glass. Balstrode is a retired merchant sea captain, shrewd as a travelled man should be, but with a general sympathy that makes him the favourite rentier of the whole Borough. He chews a plug of tobacco while he watches.

Chorus of fishermen and women

Oh hang at the open doors net, the cork
While squalid sea-dames at their mending work
Welcome the hour when fishing through the tide
The weary husband throws his freight aside.

Fishermen

O cold and wet and driven by the tide
Beat your tired arms against your tarry side.
Find rest in public bars where fiery gin
Will aid the warmth that languishes within.

Several fishermen cross to The Boar where Auntie stands in the doorway.

Fisherman

Auntie!

Auntie

Come in gentlemen, come in.

Boles

(standing aside from all the drinkers)
Her vats flow with poisoned gin.

Balstrode

(points and laughs)
Boles has gone Methody.

Auntie

A man should have
Hobbies to cheer his private life.

Fishermen go into The Boar. Others remain with their wives at the nets and boats.

Chorus

Dabbling on the shore half-naked sea-boys crowd
Swim round a ship, or swing upon a shroud:
Or in a boat purloined with paddles play
And grow familiar with the watery way.

While the second boat is being hauled in, boys are scrambling over the first.

Balstrode

Shoo you little barnacles
Up your anchors, hoist sails.

Balstrode chases them from the boat. A more respectable figure now begins, with much hat-raising, his morning progress down the High Street. He makes straight for The Boar.

Fisherman

(touches cap)
Dr Crabbe.

Boles

(points as the swinging door closes)
He drinks 'Good Health' to all diseases.

Fisherman

Storm?

Second Fisherman

Storm?

They shade their eyes, looking out to sea.

Balstrode

(glass to his eye)
A long way out. Sea horses.
The wind is holding back the tide.
If it veers round, watch for your lives.

Chorus of Fishermen

And if the Spring tide eats the land again
Till even the cottages and cobbled walks of
fishermen
Are billets for the thieving waves which take
As if in sleep, thieving for thieving's sake -

The Rector comes down the High Street. He is followed, as always, by the Borough's second most famous rentier, the widow, Mrs (Nabob) Sedley. From The Boar come the two 'Nieces' who give Auntie her nickname. They stand in front of the pub, taking the morning sun. Ned Keene, seeing Mrs Sedley, pops out of his show door.

Rector

(right and left)

Good morning, good morning.

Nieces

Good morning

Mrs Sedley

Good morning, good morning, dear Rector.

Ned

Had Auntie no nieces we'd never respect her.

Swallow

Good morning! Good morning!

Nieces

Good morning!

Mrs Sedley

Good morning, your worship, Mr Swallow.

Auntie

(to Keene)

You jeer, but if they wink you're eager to follow.

The Rector and Mrs Sedley continue towards the church.

Chorus

For us sea-dwellers, this sea-birth can be
Death to our gardens of fertility.
Yet only such contemptuous spring tide can
Tickle the virile impotence of man.

Ned

(shouts across to Auntie)

I'm coming tonight to see your nieces.

Auntie

(dignified)

The Boar is at its patron's service.

Boles

God's storm will drown your hot desires!

Balstrode

God stay the tide, or I shall share your fears.

Peter

(calls off)

Hi. Give us a hand.

(Chorus stops.)

Haul the boat!

Boles

(shouts back)

Haul it yourself, Grimes.

Peter

(off)

Hi! Somebody bring the rope.

Nobody does. Presently, Peter appears and takes the capstan rope himself and pulls it after him (off) to the boat. Then he returns. The Fishermen and WOMEN turn their backs on him and slouch away awkwardly.

Balstrode

(going to capstan)

I'll give a hand. The tide is near the turn.

Keene

(also going to capstan)

We'll drown the gossips in a tidal storm.

Grimes goes back to the boat. Balstrode and Keene turn the capstan.

Auntie

(at the door of The Boar)

Parsons may moralise and fools decide,
But a good publican takes neither side.

Balstrode

O haul away! The tide is near the turn.

Keene

Man invented morals, but tides have none.

Boles

(with arms akimbo, watches their labour)

This lost soul of a fisherman must be
Shunned by respectable society.

Oh let the captains hear, let the scholars learn:
Shielding the sin, they share the people's scorn.

Auntie

I have my business. Let the preachers learn
Hell may be fiery, but the pub won't burn.

Balstrode and Keene

The tide that floods will ebb,
The tide, the tide will turn.

The boat is hauled up. Grimes appears.

Keene

Grimes, you won't need help from now.
I've got a 'prentice for you.

Balstrode

A workhouse brat?

Keene

I called at the workhouse yesterday.
All you do now is fetch the boy.
We'll send the carter with a note.
He'll bring your bargain on his cart.
(shouts)
Jim Hobson, we've got a job for you.

Hobson

(enters)
Cart's full, sir. More than I can do.

Keene

Listen, Jim. You'll go to the workhouse
And ask for Mr Keene his purchase.
Bring him back to Grimes.

Hobson

Cart's full, sir. I have no room.

Keene

Hobson, you'll do what there is to be done.

*It is near enough to an argument to attract a crowd.
Fishermen and WOMEN gather round. Boles takes
his chance.*

Boles

Is this a Christian country?
Are pauper children so enslaved
That their bodies go for cash?

Keene

Hobson. Will you do your job?

*Ellen ORFORD has come in. She is a widow of
about 40. Her children have died, or grown up and
gone away, and in her loneliness she has become
the Borough schoolmistress. A hard life has not
hardened her. It has made her the more charitable.*

Hobson

I have to go from pub to pub
Picking up parcels, standing about.
My journey back is late at night.
Mister, find some other way
To bring your boy back.

Chorus

He's right. Dirty jobs!

Hobson

Mister, find some other way...

Ellen

Carter! I'll mind your passenger.

Chorus

What? And be Grimes's messenger?

Ellen

Whatever you say, I'm not ashamed.

Chorus

You'll be Grimes's messenger!

Ellen

Somebody must do the job.

Chorus

You!

Ellen

The carter goes from pub to pub
Picking up parcels, standing about.
The boy needs comfort late at night.
He needs a welcome on the road.
Coming here strange, he'll be afraid.
I'll mind your passenger.

Keene

Mrs Orford is talking sense -

Chorus

Ellen - you're leading us a dance,
Fetching boys for Peter Grimes,
Because the Boro' is afraid
You who help will share the blame.

Ellen

Whatever you say
Let her among you without fault
Cast the first stone,
And let the Pharisees and Saducees
Give way to none.
But whosoever feels his pride
Humbled so deep
There is no corner he can hide
Even in sleep!
Will have no trouble to find out
How a poor teacher
Widowed and loney finds delight
In shouldering care.
(as she moves up the street)
Mr. Hobson, where's your cart? I'm ready.

Hobson

Up here, ma'am. I can wait.

*The crowd stands round and watches. Some follow
Ellen and Hobson. On the edge of the crowd are
other activities.*

Mrs Sedley

(whispers to Keene)
Have you my pills?

Keene

I'm sorry, ma'am?

Mrs Sedley

My sleeping draught.

Keene

The laudanum
Is out of stock and being brought
By Mr Carrier Hobson's cart.
He's back tonight.

Mrs Sedley

Good Lord, good Lord, good Lord.

Keene

Meet us both in the pub, The Boar,
Auntie's we call it. It's quite safe.

Mrs Sedley

I've never been in a pub in my life.

Keene

You'll come?

Mrs Sedley

All right.

Keene

Tonight?

Mrs Sedley

All right.
(She moves off up the street.)

Keene

If the old dear takes much more laudanum
She'll land herself one day in Bedlam!

Balstrode

(looking seaward through his glass)
Look! the storm cone!
The wind veers
In from the sea
At gale force.

All

Look out for squalls
 The wind veers
 In from sea
 At gale force.
 Make your boat fast!

Shutter your windows
 And bring in all the nets
 Now the flood tide
 And sea-horses
 Will gallop across
 The eroded coast,
 Flooding, flooding
 Our seasonal fears.
 Look! The storm cone
 The wind veers.
 A high tide coming
 Will eat the land
 A tide no breakwaters can withstand
 Fasten your boats. The spring tide's here
 With a gale behind.

Chorus

Is there much to fear?

Keene

Only for the goods you're rich in:
 It won't drown your conscience,
 it might flood your kitchen.

Boles

(passionately)

God has His ways which are not ours:
 His high tide swallows up the shores.
 Repent!

Keene

And keep your wife upstairs.

All

O Tide that waits for no man
 Spare our coasts.

Exeunt except for Peter and Balstrode - mostly through the swinging doors of The Boar. Dr. Crabbe's hat blows away, and is rescued for him by Keene, who bows him into the pub. Finally only Peter and Balstrode are left, Peter gazing seaward, Balstrode hesitating at the pub door.

Balstrode

And do you prefer the storm
 To Auntie's parlour and the rum?

Peter

I live alone. The habit grows.

Balstrode

Grimes, since you're a lonely soul
 Born to blocks and spars and ropes
 Why not try the wider sea
 With merchantman or privateer?

Peter

I am native, rooted here.

Balstrode

Rooted by what?

Peter

By familiar fields,
 Marsh and sand,
 Ordinary streets,
 Prevailing wind.

Balstrode

You'd slip these moorings if you had the mind.

Peter

By the shut faces
 Of the Borough clans;
 And by the kindness
 Of a casual glance.

Balstrode

You'll find no comfort there.
 When an urchin's quarrelsome,
 Brawling at his childish games,
 Mother stops him with a threat,
 "You'll be sold to Peter Grimes."

Peter

Selling me new apprentices,
 Children taught to be ashamed
 Of the legend on their faces -
 "You've been sold to Peter Grimes!"

Balstrode

Then the Crouner sits to
 Hint, but not mention crimes,
 And publishes an open verdict
 Whispers about this Peter Grimes.
 Your boy was workhouse starved -
 Maybe you're not to blame he died.

Peter

Picture what that day was like
 That evil day.
 We strained into the wind
 Heavily laden,
 We plunged into the waves
 Shuddering challenge,
 Then the sea rose to a storm
 Over the gunwales,
 And the boy's silent reproach
 Turned to illness.
 Then home
 Among fishing nets
 Alone, alone, alone
 With a childish death!

Balstrode

This storm is useful. You can speak your mind
 And never mind the Borough commentary.
 There is more grandeur in a gale of wind
 To free confession, set a conscience free.

Peter

They listen to money,
 These Borough gossips.
 I have my visions,
 Fiery visions.
 They call me dreamer,
 They scoff at my dreams
 And my ambition.
 But I know a way
 To answer the Borough.
 I'll win them over.

Balstrode

With the new 'prentice?

Peter

We'll sail together.
 These Borough gossips
 Listen to money,
 Only to money:
 I'll fish the sea dry,
 Sell the good catches.
 That wealthy merchant
 Grimes will set up
 Household and shop;
 You will all see it!
 I'll marry Ellen.
 I'll marry Ellen.
 I'll marry Ellen!

Balstrode

Man - go an ask her
 Without your booty,
 She'll have you now.

Peter

No - not for pity!...

Balstrode

Then the old tragedy
 Is in store:
 New start with new 'prentice
 Just as before.

Peter

What Peter Grimes decides
 Is his affair.

Balstrode

You fool, man, fool!

*The wind has risen, Balstrode is shouting above it.
 Peter faces him angrily.*

Peter

Are you my conscience?

Balstrode

Might as well
 Try to shout the wind down as to tell
 The obvious truth.

Peter

Take your advice -
 Put it where your money is.

Balstrode

The storm is here. O come away.

Peter

The storm is here and I shall stay.

The storm is rising. Auntie comes out of The Boar to fasten the shutters, in front of the windows.

Balstrode goes to help her. He looks back towards Peter, then goes into the pub.

What harbour shelters peace?

Away from tidal waves, away from storms,

What harbour can embrace

Terrors and tragedies?

With her there'll be no quarrels,

With her the mood with stay,

Her breast is harbour too

Where night has turned to day.

The wind rises. Peter stands a moment, as if leaning against the wind.

CURTAIN.

ACT ONE

Scene 2

Interior of The Boar. Typical main room in a country pub. No bar. Upright settles, tables, log fire. When the curtain rises, Auntie is admitting Mrs Sedley. The gale has risen to hurricane force and Auntie holds the door with difficulty against the wind, which rattles the windows and howls in the chimney. Both women push the door closed.

Auntie

Past time to close.

Mrs Sedley

He, he, he said half-past ten.

Auntie

Who?

Mrs Sedley

Mr Keene.

Auntie

Him and his women!

Mrs Sedley

You referring to me?

Auntie

Not at all, not at all.
What do you want?

Mrs Sedley

Room from the storm.

Auntie

That is the sort of weak politeness
Makes a publican lose her clients.
Keep in the corner out of sight.

Balstrode and a Fisherman enter. They struggle with the door.

Balstrode

Phew, that's a bitch of a gale all right.

Auntie

(nods her head towards Mrs Sedley)
Sh-h-h.

Balstrode

Sorry. I didn't see you missus.
You'll give the regulars a surprise.

Auntie

She's meeting Ned.

Balstrode

Which Ned?

Auntie

The quack.
He's looking after her heart attack.

Balstrode

Bring us a pint.

Auntie

It's closing time.

Balstrode

You fearful old female - why should you mind?

Auntie

The storm.

BOB Boles and other Fishermen ENTER. The wind howls through the door and again there is difficulty in closing it.

Boles

Did you hear the tide
Has broken over the Northern Road?

Boles leaves the door open too long with disastrous consequences. A sudden gust howls through the door. The shutters of the window fly open, and a pane of glass blows in.

Balstrode

(shouts)
Get those shutters!

Auntie

(screams)
O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode

You fearful old female, why do you
Leave your windows naked?

Auntie

O-o-o-o-o!

Balstrode

Better strip a niece or two
And clamp your shutters.

The two 'Nieces' run in. They are young, pretty enough though a little worn, conscious that they are the chief attractions of The Boar. At the moment they are in mild hysterics, having run downstairs in their night clothes, though with their unusual instinct for precaution each has found time to done a wrap. It is not clear whether they are sisters, friends, or simply colleagues: but they behave like twins, as though each has only half a personality, and they cling together always to sustain their self-esteem.

Nieces

Oo! Oo!

It's blown our bedroom windows in.
Oo! we'll be drowned.

Balstrode

Perhaps in gin.

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if it didn't howl.
It gets on my nerves.

Balstrode

D'you think we
Would stop our storm for such as you -
Coming all over palpitations!
Oo! Oo!
Auntie, get some new relations.

Auntie

(takes this badly)

Loud man, I never did have time
For the kind of creature who spits in his wine.
A joke's a joke and fun is fun.
A joke's a joke and fun is fun,
But say your grace and be polite for all that we have done.

Nieces

For his peace of mind.

Mrs Sedley

This is no place for me.

Auntie

Loud man, you're glad enough to be
Playing your cards in our company.
A joke's a joke and fun is fun.
A joke's a joke and fun is fun,
But say your grace and be polite for all that we have done.

Nieces

For his peace of mind.

Mrs Sedley

This is no place for me.

Auntie

Loud man - !

Two Fishermen ENTER. Usual struggle with the door.

First Fisherman

There's been a landslide up the coast.

Boles

(rising unsteadily)
I'm drunk. Drunk.

Balstrode

You're a Methody wastrel.

Boles

(staggers to one of the Nieces)
Is this a niece of yours?

Auntie

That's so.

Boles

Who's her father?

Auntie

Who wants to know?

Boles

I want to pay my best respects
To the beauty and misery of her sex.

Balstrode

Old Methody, you'd better tune
Your piety to another hymn.

Boles

I want her.

Balstrode

Sh-h-h.

Boles

I want her.

Auntie

(cold)

Turn that man out.

Balstrode

He's the local preacher.

He's lost the way of carrying liquor.

He means no harm.

Boles

No, I mean love!

Balstrode

Come on, boy!

Boles hits him. Mrs Sedley screams. Balstrode quietly overpowers Boles and sits him in a chair.

Balstrode

We live and let live

And look, we keep our hands to ourselves.

Boles stuggles to his feet. Balstrode sits him down again, laying down the law.

Pub conversation should depend

On this eternal moral;

So long as satire don't descend

To fisticuff or quarrel.

We live and let live, and look

We keep our hands to ourselves.

And while Boles is being forced into his chair again, the bystanders comment.

Chorus

We live and let live, and look

We keep our hands to ourselves.

Balstrode

We sit and drink the evening through,

Not deigning to devote a

Thought to the daily cud we chew,

But buying drinks by rota.

Chorus

We live and let live, and look

We keep our hands to ourselves.

Door opens. The struggle with the wind is worse than before as Ned Keene gets through.

Keene

Have you heard? The cliff is down

Up by Grimes's hut.

Auntie

Where is he?

Mrs Sedley

Thank God you've come.

Keene

You won't blow away.

Mrs Sedley

The carter's over half an hour late.

Balstrode

He'll be later still: the road's under flood.

Mrs Sedley

I can't stay longer. I refuse.

Keene

You'll have to stay if you want your pills.

Mrs Sedley

With drunken females and in brawls!

Keene

They're Auntie's nieces, that's what they are,

And better than you for kissing, ma.

Mind that door!

Balstrode

Mind that door!

All

Mind that door!

The door opens again. Peter Grimes has come in. Unlike the rest, he wears no oilskins. His hair looks wild. He advances into the room, shaking the rain from his hair. Mrs Sedley faints. Keene catches her as she falls.

Keene

Get the brandy, aunt.

Auntie

Who'll pay?

Keene

Her. I'll charge her for it.

Chorus

Talk of the devil and there he is.
A devil he is. A devil he is.
Grimes is waiting his apprentice.

Peter sits down. The others move away from that side of the table.

Keene

This widow's as strong as any two
Fishermen I have met.
Everybody's very quiet.

No-one answers. The silence is broken by Peter.

Peter

(as if thinking aloud)

Now the Great Bear and Pleiades where earth moves
Are drawing up the clouds of human grief,
Breathing solemnity in the deep night.
Who can decipher
In storm or starlight
The written character of a friendly fate -
As the sky turns, the world for us to change?
But if the horoscope's bewildering
Like a flashing turmoil of a shoal of herring,
Who can turn skies back and begin again?

Silence again. Then muttering in undertones.

Chorus

He's mad or drunk. Why's that man here?

Nieces

His song alone would sour the beer.

Chorus

His temper's up. O chuck him out.

Nieces

I wouldn't mind if he didn't howl.

Chorus

He looks as though he's nearly drowned.

Boles

(staggers up to Grimes)

You've sold your soul, Grimes.

Balstrode

Come away.

Boles

Satan's got no hold on me.

Balstrode

Leave him alone, you drunkard.
(goes to get hold of Boles)

Boles

I'll hold the gospel light before
The cataract that blinds his eyes.

Peter

(as Boles stumbles up to him)

Get out.

Grimes thrusts Boles aside roughly and turns away.

Boles

His exercise
Is not with men but killing boys.

Boles picks up a bottle and is about to bring it down on Grimes's head when Balstrode knocks it out of his hand and it crashes, shattering, to the floor.

Auntie

For God's sake, help me keep the peace.
D'you want me up at the next Assize?

Balstrode

For peace's sake, someone start a song.

All

Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and

Auntie

(That's right, Ned!)

All

You Know has gone fishing and
Found them a shoal.
Pull them in in handfuls,
And in canfuls,
And in panfuls,
Bring them in sweetly,
Gut them completely,
Pack them up neatly,
Sell them discreetly,
Oh, haul a-way.

Peter

(enters round, silencing the others)

When I had gone fishing
When he had gone fishing
When You Know'd gone fishing
He found us Davy Jones.
Bring him in with horror,
Bring him in with terror,
And bring him in with sorrow!
Oh, haul a-way.

After he finishes, the others resume their singing. At the climax of the round, the door opens to admit Ellen ORFORD, the boy JOHN, and Hobson. They are soaked, muddy, and bedraggled.

Hobson

The bridge is down, we half swam over.

Keene

And your cart? Is it seaworthy?

The WOMEN go to Ellen and JOHN. Auntie fusses over them. Boles reproaches them.

Ellen

We're chilled to the bone.

Boles

(to Ellen)

Serves you right, woman.

Auntie

My dear
There's brandy and hot water to spare.

Nieces

Let's look at the boy.

Ellen

(rising)

Let him be.

Nieces

Nice sweet thing.

Ellen

Not for such as you.

Peter

Let's go. You ready?

Auntie

Let them warm up.
They've been half drowned.

Peter

Time to get off.

Auntie

Your hut's washed away.

Peter

Only the cliff.
Young 'prentice, come.

John hesitates. Ellen leads him to Peter.

Ellen

Goodbye, my dear, God bless you.
Peter will take you home.

Others

Home? Do you call that home?

Peter takes the boy out the door into the storm.

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Scene as in Act One. The Street. A fine, sunny morning, some weeks later. The street is deserted until Ellen and the boy JOHN ENTER. Ellen is carrying a work basket. She sits down between a boat and a breakwater and takes her knitting from the basket. One or two latecomers cross and hurry into the church.

Ellen

Glitter of waves
And glitter of sunlight
Bid us rejoice
And lift our hearts on high.
Man alone
Has a soul to save
And goes to church
To worship on a Sunday.

The organ starts a voluntary in the church.

Shall we not go to church this Sunday
But do our knitting by the sea?
I'll do the work. You talk.

A hymn starts in church.

Chorus

(off, in church)

Now that the daylight fills the sky
We lift our hearts to God on high
That He in all we do or say
Would keep us free from harm to-day.

Ellen

Nothing to tell me.
Nothing to say? Then shall I
Tell you what your life was like!
See if I'm right. I think
You liked your workhouse with its grave,
Empty look. Perhaps you weren't
So unhappy in your loneliness.
When I first started teaching
The life at school to me seemed bleak and empty,
But soon I found a way of knowing children -
Found the woes of little people
Hurt more, but are more simple.

Chorus

May He restrain our tongues from strife
Shield from anger's din our life
And guard with watchful care our eyes
From earth's absorbing vanities.

Ellen

John, you may have heard the stories
Of the 'prentice Peter had before.

Chorus

So we, when this day's work is done
And shades of night return once more.
Amen.

Ellen

But when you came, I
Said, Now this is where we
Make a new start. Every day
I pray it may be so.

Rector

Wherefore, I pray and beseech you, as many as are
here present, to accompany me with a pure heart
and humble voice, saying after me, Almighty...

Chorus

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred
and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep.
And we have done those things which
We ought not to have
And grant, O most merciful Father...

Ellen

There's a tear in your coat. Was that done
Before you came?
Badly torn.
That was done recently.
Take your hand away.
Your neck is it? John, what
Are you trying to hide?

Chorus

O, Lord open Thou our lips
And our mouths shall show forth Thy praise.

Rector

O God make speed to save us.

Chorus

O Lord make haste to help us.

Ellen undoes the neck of John's shirt.

Ellen

A bruise.
Well...it's begun.

Chorus

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now...

Ellen

Child, you're not too young to know
Where the roots of sorrow are
Innocent, you've learned how near
Life is to torture.

Rector

Praise ye the Lord.

Chorus

The Lord's name be praised.

Ellen

Let this be a holiday
Full of peace and quietness
While the treason of the waves
Glitters like love.
Glitters like love.
Storm and all its terrors are
Nothing to the heart's despair.
After the storm will come a sleep
Like oceans deep, like oceans deep.

Chorus

O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.
O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord.
O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord.
Praise Him and magnify Him forever.

Peter Grimes enters.

O ye Light and Darkness, bless ye the Lord.
O ye Nights and Days, bless ye the Lord.
O ye Lightnings and Clouds, bless ye the Lord.
Praise Him and magnify Him forever.

Peter

Come boy.

Ellen

Peter - what for?

Chorus

O ye Wells, bless ye the Lord.
O ye Seas and Floods, bless the Lord.
O ye Whales and all that move in the waters
Praise Him and magnify Him forever.

Peter

I've seen a shoal. I need his help.

Ellen

But if there were, then al the boats
Would fast be launching.

Peter

I can see
The shoals to which the rest are blind.

Chorus

O all ye Fowls of the Air, bless ye the Lord.
O all ye Beasts and Cattle, bless ye the Lord.
O all ye Children of Men, bless ye the Lord.
Praise Him and magnify Him forever.

Ellen

This is Sunday, his day of rest.

Peter

This is whatever day I say it is!
Come boy!

Ellen

You and John have fished all week,
Night and day without a break,
Painting boat, mending nets, cleaning fish.
Now let him rest.

Peter

Come boy!

Ellen

But your bargain...

Peter

My bargain?

Ellen

His weekly rest.

Peter

He works for me. Leave him alone. He's mine.

Ellen

Hush, hush! Peter, Peter!
Hush, Peter! Hush, Peter! Hush, Peter!

Chorus

O ye Servants of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.
O ye Holy and Humble, bless ye the Lord.
Ananias, Azarias, and Misael, bless ye the Lord.
Praise Him and magnify Him forever.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

The sounds from the church die down. The lesson is being read.

Ellen

The unrelenting work
This grey, unresting industry,
What aim, what future,
What peace will your hard profits buy?

Peter

Buy us a home, buy us respect,
And buy us freedom from pain
Of grinning at gossip's tale.
Believe in me, we shall be free.

Chorus

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth,
And in Jesus Christ, His only son...
Our Lord who was conceived...
(fades into the background)

Ellen

Peter, tell me one thing, where
The youngster got that ugly bruise.

Peter

Out of the hurly burly...

Ellen

O your ways
Are hard and rough beyond his days
Peter, were we right, were we right in what we
planned
To do. Were we right, were we right?

Peter

Take away your hand.
(quietly)
My only hope depends on you.
If you - take it away - what's left?

Ellen

Were we mistaken when we schemed
To solve your life by lonely toil?
Were we mistaken when we dreamed
That we'd come through and all be well?

Peter

(angry)
Wrong to plan?
Wrong to try?
Wrong to live?
Right to die?
Wrong to struggle?
Wrong to hope?
Then the Borough's
Right again?

Ellen

Peter, you cannot buy your peace
You'll never stop the gossips' talk
With all the fish from out the sea.
We were mistaken to have dreamed,
Peter. We've failed. We've failed.

*He cries out, as if in agony. Then he strikes her.
Her basket falls.*

Chorus

Amen.

Peter

So be it! - And God have mercy upon me!

John runs from him. Peter follows. Ellen watches, then goes out the other way. Behind closed doors and half-open windows, neighbours have been watching. Three now emerge: first Auntie, then Keene, finally Boles.

Auntie

Fool to let it come to this,
Wasting pity, squandering tears.

Keene

See the glitter in his eyes.
Grimes is at his exercise.

Boles

What he fears is that the Lord
Follows with a flaming sword.

Auntie

You see all tho' crazy eyes.

Keene

Grimes is at his exercise.

Boles

Where's the pastor of this flock,
Where's the guardian shepherd's hook?

Together

Parson, lawyer, all at prayers.

*The Benediction is spoken in church, then the
congregation emerges.*

Now the church parade begins,
Fresh beginning for fresh sins,
Ogling with a pious gaze,
Each one at his exercise.

Dr Crabbe approaches.

Auntie

Doctor!

Keene

Leave him out of this.

Mrs Sedley

What is it?

Keene

Private business.

Mrs Sedley

I heard two voices during psalms
One was Grimes's, the other more calm.

Boles

While you worshipped idols there
The Devil had his Sabbath here.

Mrs Sedley

Maltreating that poor boy again.

Balstrode

Grimes is weatherwise and skilled
In the practice of his trade.
Let him be, let us forget
What slander can invent.

Chorus

What is it?

Auntie, Keene, Boles

What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

*The people, led by Swallow and another lawyer,
continue coming out of church, two by two, and
circulate around the village green singing their
couplets as they reach the centre.*

Chorus

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

Lawyer

Dullards build their self-esteem
By inventing cruelties.

Swallow

Even so, the law restrains
Too-impetuous exercise.

Woman

Fishing's a lonely trade
Single men have much to bear.

Nieces

If a man's work cannot be made
Decent, let him stay ashore.

Chorus

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

Rector

My flock - oh what a weight is this
My burden pastoral.

Mrs Sedley

But what a dangerous faith is this
That gives souls equality!

Balstrode

When the Borough gossip starts
Somebody will suffer.

Chorus

What is it? What do you suppose?
Grimes is at his exercise.

Boles

(climbing halfway up steps of Moot Hall)
People - No. I will speak...
This thing here concerns you all.

Chorus

(crowding around Boles)
Whoever's guilty gets the rap;
The Borough keeps its standards up.

Balstrode

Tub-thumping.

Boles

This 'prentice system's
Uncivilised, uncivilised and un-Christian.

Balstrode

Something of the sort befits
Brats conceived outside the sheets.

Boles

Where's the parson in his black?
Is he here or is he not
To guide a sinful, straying flock?

Chorus

Where's the parson?

Rector

Is it my business?

Boles

Your business to ignore,
Growing at your door,
Evils, like your fancy flowers?

Chorus

Evils!

Rector

Calm now, tell me what it is.

Ellen enters. She is met by Auntie, who has picked up her abandoned work-basket and its contents.

Auntie

Ellen dear, see I have gathered
All your things. Come rest inside.

Boles and Chorus

She can tell you, Ellen Orford.
She helped him at his cruel games.

Rector

(holding up his hand for silence)
Ellen, please.

Ellen

What am I to do?

Boles and Chorus

Speak out in the name of the Lord.

Ellen

We planned that their lives should
Have a new start,
That I, as a friend, could
Make the plan work
By bringing comfort where
Their lives were stark.

Rector

You planned to be worldly-wise,
But your souls were dark.

Ellen

We planned this time to
Care for the boy;
To save him from danger
And hardship sore,
And mending his clothes and giving him
Regular meals.

Mrs Sedley

O little care you for the 'prentice
Or his welfare!

Boles

Call it danger, call it hardship
Or plain murder!

Keene

But thanks to flinty hearts
Even quacks can make a profit.

Swallow

You planned to heal sick souls
With bodily care.

Nieces

Perhaps his clothes you mended
But you work his bones bare!

Auntie

You meant just to be kind
And avert fear!

Balstrode

You interfering gossips, this
Is not your business!

Hobson

Pity the boy!

Ellen

O pity those who try to bring
A shadowed life into the sun.

Ellen, Auntie, Balstrode

O hard, hard hearts!

Chorus

Who lets us down must take the rap;
The Borough keeps its standards up.

All (except Ellen, Auntie, and Balstrode)

Ha-Ha!
Tried to be kind!
Murder!
Tried to be kind and to help.
Murder!

Rector

Swallow - shall we go and see Grimes in his hut?

Swallow

Popular feeling's rising.

Rector

Balstrode. I'd like you to come.

Balstrode

I warn you. We shall waste our time.

Rector

I'd like your presence just the same.

Mrs Sedley

Little do the suspects know,
I've the evidence. I've a clue.

Chorus

Now we shall find out the worst.

Swallow

(indicating the Nieces)
No ragtail, no bobtail, if you please.

Boles

Back to the gutter - you keep out of this.

Rector

Only the men. The women stay.

Swallow

Carter Hobson, fetch the drum.
Summon the Boro' to Grimes's hut.

Chorus

To Grimes's hut!
To Grimes's hut!

*Swallow leads the way. Hobson sounds his drum.
Mrs Sedley and Swallow follow. Balstrode lags
behind. Behind them, the rest of the crowd.*

Now is gossip put on trial,
Now the rumours either fail
Or are shouted in the wind
Sweeping furious through the land.
Now the liars shiver for
Now, if they've cheated, we shall know.
We shall strike and strike to kill
At the slander or the sin.
Now the whisperers stand out
Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife:
What's done now is done for life.
Now.

Exeunt, except for Auntie, Nieces, and Ellen.

Nieces

From the gutter, why should we
Trouble at their ribaldries?

Auntie

And shall we be ashamed because
We comfort men from ugliness?

All

Do we smile or do we weep,
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

Auntie

When in storm they shelter here,
When the shelter here,
And we smooth their fears away.

Nieces

We know they'll whistle their goodbyes,
Yes, they'll whistle their goodbyes
Next fine day, and put to sea.

Ellen

On the manly calendar
We only mark heroic days.

All

Do we smile or do we weep,
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

Ellen

They are children when they weep.
We are mothers when we strive,
Schooling our own hearts to keep
The bitter treasure of their love.

All

Do we smile or do we weep,
Or wait quietly till they sleep?

CURTAIN.

ACT TWO

Scene 2

Grimes's hut is an upturned boat. It is on the whole shipshape, though bare and forbidding. Ropes coiled, nets, kegs, and casks furnish the place. It is lighted by a skylight. There are two doors, one opens out onto the cliff, the other opens onto the road. John staggers into the room as if thrust from behind. Peter follows. He pulls down the boy's fishing clothes, which were neatly stacked on a shelf.

Grimes

Go there! Go there! Go there!
(throwing sea boots down at John's feet)
Here's your sea boots. Take those bright
And fancy buckles off your feet.
There's your oilskin and sou'wester.
Stir your pins, we must get ready.
There's the jersey that she knitted
With the anchor that she patterned.

Peter throws clothes at John; they fall around him to the floor. John weeps. Peter shakes him.

I'll tear the collar off your neck.
Steady. Don't take fright, boy. Stop.

Peter opens the cliff-side door, looks out.

Look. Now's our chance.
The whole sea is boiling. Get the nets.
Come boy.
They listen to money
These Borough gossips,
Listen to money,
Only to money.
I'll fish the sea dry,
Flood the market.
And now is our chance to get a good catch,
Get money to choke
Down rumour's throat.
I will set up -
With house and home and shop.
I'll marry Ellen, I'll...
I'll marry Ellen, I'll...

Peter sees that the boy is still weeping. Gentler than before, he helps John off with his coat, and picks up the jersey.

Coat off. Jersey on.

My boy...we're going to sea!

In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home,
Warm in my heart, and in a golden calm
Where there'll be no more fear and no more storm.
And she will soon forget her schoolhouse ways,
Forget the labour of those weary days,
Wrapped round in kindness like September haze.
The learned at their books have no more store
Of wisdom than we'd close behind our door.
Compared with us, the rich man would be poor.
I've seen in stars the life that we might share:
Seen in stars the life we'd share
Fruit in the garden, children by the shore,
A whitened doorstep, and a woman's care.
And a woman's care.
But dreaming builds what dreaming can disown.
Dead fingers stretch themselves to tear it down.
I hear those voices that will not be drowned,
Calling. There is no stone
In earth's thickness to make a home,
That you can build with and remain alone.

John watches Peter in fascinated horror. Peter turns on him suddenly.

Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut.
He's there now, I can see it, he is there
His eyes are on me as they were that evil day.
Stop moaning boy. Water?
There's no more water. You had the last yesterday.
You'll soon be home
In harbour calm and deep.

Chorus

(in the distance)

Now! Now!

Peter goes to the street door, looks out.

Peter

There's an odd procession here.
Parson and Swallow growing near.

John doesn't move. Peter throws open the cliff-side door, then turns on John.

Wait. You've been talking.
You and that bitch were gossiping.
What lies have you been telling?
The Borough's climbing up the hill.
To get me! To get me. Me! Me, me! O, I'm not
scared
I'll send them off with a flea in their ear.
I'll show them, I'll show them. Grimes ahoy! Grimes
ahoy!

Chorus

Or are shouted in the wind
Sweeping furious through the land.
Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife.
What's done now is done for life.
Now the liars shiver for
Now, if they've cheated, we shall know.
We shall strike and strike to kill
At the slander or the sin.
Now!

Peter

You sit there watching me
And you're the cause of everything.
Your eyes, like his, are watching me
With an idiot's drooling gaze.
Will you move
Or must I make you dance?
Step boldly, step boldly, boldly. For
Here's the way we go to sea:
Down the cliff
To find that shoal, to find that shoal
That's boiling in the sea.
Careful, or you'll break your neck
Down the cliff-side to the deck.

Rope in hand, Peter drives the boy towards the cliff-side door.

I'll pitch the stuff down. Come on!
(*picking up ropes and nets*)
Now
Shut your eyes and down you go.

The Rector knocks at the street door. Peter turns towards it, then retreats. JOHN climbs out. Pause. JOHN screams and falls out of sight. Peter runs to the cliff door, feels for his grip, then swings out after the boy. The Rector continues knocking on the street door, then opens it and pokes his head in.

Rector

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes! Nobody here?

Swallow

What about the other door?

They enter the hut, open the cliff-side door, and look out. Pause.

Rector

Was this a recent landslide?

Swallow

Yes.

Rector

It makes almost a precipice.
How deep?

Swallow

Say forty feet.

Rector

Dangerous to leave the door open.

Keene

He used to keep his boat down there.
Maybe they've both gone fishing.

Rector

Yet
His hut is reasonably kept.
Here's order. Here's skill.

Swallow

The whole affair gives Borough talk its - shall
I say quietus? Here we come pell-mell,
Expecting to find out we know not what,
And all we find is a neat and empty hut.
Gentlemen, take this to your wives:
Less interference in our private lives.

Rector

There's no point certainly in staying here,
And will the last to go please to close the door.

Exeunt, except Balstrode, who hesitates, looks around the hut, closes the street door, then opens the cliff door, looks out, and quickly climbs down the way Peter and John went.

CURTAIN.**ACT THREE**

Scene 1 Scene as in Act One, a few days later. The time is summer evening. One of the season's subscription dances is taking place in the Moot Hall, which is brightly lit and from which we can hear the band playing a polka, and the rhythm of the dancers' feet. The Boar, too, is brightly lit and as the dance goes on there will be a regular flow of men from the Moot Hall to the pub. The stage is empty when the CURTAIN RISES. Soon, a little squeal, and one of the Nieces scampers down the outside staircase of the Moot Hall, chased by Swallow. The other NIECE appears at the top of the Moot Hall steps.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll seal the deed and take no fee.
My signature, your graceful mark,
Are witnessed by the abetting dark.

Nieces

Together we are safe
As any wedded wife,
For safety in numbers lies.
A man is always lighter,
His conversation's brighter
Provided that the tete-a-tete's in threes.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me,
I'll call it real property:
Your sister shan't insist upon
Her stay of execution.

Nieces

Save us from lonely men;
They're like a broody hen
With habits but with no ideas;
They show their coloured feathers
Provided that the tete-a-tete's in threes.

Swallow

I shall take steps to change her mind,
She has first option on my love.
If my appeal should be ignored
I'll take it to the House of Lords.

Nieces

O pairing's all to blame
 For awkwardness and shame,
 And all these manly sighs and tears
 Which wouldn't be expended
 If people condescended
 Always to have their t...te's in threes.

Swallow

Assign your prettiness to me.
 We'll make an absolute decree
 Of quiet enjoyment which you'll bless
 By sending sister somewhere else.

Second niece

Ned Keene is chasing me, gives me no peace.

Swallow

He went to The Boar to have a glass;
 Sister and I will join him there.
 If you don't want Ned you'd better stay here.

*He opens the door of The Boar for the First Niece,
 who hesitates.*

First niece

They're all watching. I must wait
 Till Auntie's turned her back.

*She runs back to her sister, leaving Swallow holding
 the door.*

Swallow

Bah!
 (goes into the pub)

*The dancing stops in the Moot Hall, followed by
 applause. The Nieces are climbing the steps back up
 to the Moot Hall when Ned Keene comes out. The
 Nieces fly down the steps, giggling, and hide behind
 a boat on shore.*

Keene

(calling as he follows them)
 Ahoy! Ahoy! Ahoy!

Mrs Sedley

(following Keene)

Mr Keene! Mr Keene! Mr Keene!
 Can you spare a moment?
 I've something to say that's more than urgent
 About Peter Grimes and that boy.
 Neither of them was seen yesterday.
 It's more than suspicion now, it's fact.
 The boy's disappeared.

Keene

Do you expect me to act
 Like a Bow Street runner or a constable?

Mrs Sedley

At least you can trouble to hear what I've got to
 say.

For two days I've kept my eyes open,
 For two days I've said nothing;
 Only watched and taken notes,
 Pieced clue to clue and bit by bit,
 Reconstructed all the crime.
 Everything points to Peter Grimes.
 He is the murderer.

Keene

Old woman, you're far too ready
 To yell blue murder.
 If people poke their noses
 Into other people's business,
 No! They won't get me to help them.
 They'll find there's merry hell to pay.
 You just tell me where's the body.

Mrs Sedley

In the sea the 'prentice lies
 Whom nobody has seen for days.
 Murder most foul it is.
 Eerie I find it,
 My skin's a prickly heat,
 Blood cold behind it.
 In midnight's loneliness
 And thrilling quiet
 The history I trace,
 The stifling secret.
 Murder most fouls it is...
 Murder most foul it is,
 And I'll declare.

Keene

Are you mad, old woman
Or is it too much laudanum?

Mrs Sedley

Has Peter Grimes been seen?

Keene

He's away.

Mrs Sedley

And the boy?

Keene

They're fishing likely.

Mrs Sedley

Has his boat been seen?

Keene

Why should it?

Mrs Sedley

His hut's abandoned.

Keene

I'm dry. Good night.

The dancing in the Moot Hall stops again. Keene breaks away from Mrs Sedley, goes into The Boar. Dr. CRABBE, the Rector, and other burgesses come down the Moot Hall stairs. Mrs Sedley retreats into the shadow of the boats. A hornpipe starts in the Moot Hall.

Burgess

Come along, doctor -
We're not wanted here, we oldsters.

Burgesses

Good night - it's time for bed.
Good night! Good night! Good night, good sirs,
good night!
Good night! Good night! Good night, good people,
good night!

Rector

I looked in a moment, the company's gay,
With pretty young women and youths on the spree
All parched like my roses, but now the sun's down.
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine.

Burgesses

Good night! Good night! Good night, good people,
good night!

Rector

Good night, Dr. Crabbe, all good friends goodnight.
Don't let the ladies keep company too late.
Don't let the ladies keep company too late.
My love to the maidens, wish luck to the men.
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine.
(he exits)

Burgesses

Good night! Good night! Good night, good people,
good night!

Mrs Sedley

(still hiding)
Crime, which my hobby is
Sweetens my thinking.
men who can breach the peace
And kill convention -
So many guilty ghosts
With stealthy bodies
Trouble my midnight thoughts....

Ellen and Balstrode walk up slowly from the beach, solemnly preoccupied. Balstrode shines his lamp on the nearest boat, The Boy Billy. They do not see Mrs Sedley.

Ellen

Is the boat in?

Balstrode

Yes! For more than an hour.
Peter seems to have disappeared.
Not in his boat, not in his hut.

Ellen

(holding out JOHN's jersey)
This I found
Down by the tide-mark.

Balstrode

The boy's?

Ellen

My 'broidered anchor on the chest.
 Embroidery in childhood was
 A luxury of idleness.
 A coil of silken thread giving
 Dreams of a silk and satin life.
 Now my 'broidery affords
 The clue whose meaning we avoid.
 My hand remembered its old skill -
 These stitches tell a curious tale.
 I remember I was brooding
 On the fantasies of children
 And dreamt that only by wishing I
 Could bring some silk into their lives.
 Now my 'broidery affords the clue,
 Now my 'broidery affords,
 Now my 'broidery affords
 The clue whose meaning we avoid.

Balstrode

We'll find him, maybe give a hand.

Ellen

We have no power to help him now.
 We have no power.

Balstrode

We have the power. We have the power.
 In the black moment
 When your friend suffers
 Unearthly torment
 We cannot turn our backs.
 When horror breaks one heart
 All hearts are broken. All are broken.

Ellen

We shall be there with him.

Balstrode

We shall be there with him.
 Nothing to do but wait
 Since the solution
 Is beyond life - beyond
 Dissolution.

The EXIT. Mrs Sedley crosses to The Boar.

Mrs Sedley

(calling through the door)
 Mr Swallow, Mr Swallow.
 I want the lawyer Swallow.

Auntie

What do you want?

Mrs Sedley

I want the lawyer Swallow.

Auntie

He's busy.

Mrs Sedley

Fetch him please, this is official
 Business about the Boro' criminal.
 please do as I tell you!

Auntie

My customers come here for peace, for quiet
 Away from you and from all such nuisances.

Mrs Sedley

This is an insult.

Auntie

You will find
 So long as I am here I always speak my mind.

Mrs Sedley

I'll have you know your place, You baggage!

Auntie

My customers come here,
 They take their drink, they take their ease!

Swallow

(emerging from The Boar)

Hi. What's the matter.
 Tell me. What's the matter.
 What is it? What is it?
 What's all this noise about?

Auntie

Good night!
(disappears into the pub with bang of the door)

Mrs Sedley

(points dramatically)
 Look!

Swallow

I'm short-
 Sighted you know.

Mrs Sedley

Look! It's Grimes's boat, back at last.

Swallow

That's different. Hey.

(shouts into The Boar)

Is Hobson there? Is Hobson there?

Mrs Sedley

Good, now things are moving. And about time too.

Hobson

Ay, ay, sir. Ay, ay, sir.

Swallow

You're constable of the Borough,

Carter Hobson.

Hobson

Ay, ay, sir.

Swallow

As the mayor

I ask you to find Peter Grimes.

Take whatever help you need.

Hobson

Now what I claims

Is he's out at sea.

Swallow

But here's his boat.

Hobson

Oh! We'll send a posse to his hut.

Swallow

If he's not there, you'll search the shore,

The marsh, the fields, the streets, the Borough.

Hobson

Ay, ay, sir.

Mrs Sedley

Crime - that's my hobby - is

By cities hoarded.

Rarely are country minds

Lifted to murder,

The noblest of my crimes

Which are my study.

And now the crime is here,

And I am ready.

Hobson

(calling into The Boar)

Hey there! Hey! Come out and help! Grimes is around. Hey! Hey there! Come on!

Boles emerges with other fishermen. The news reaches the Moot Hall, and people start crowding the beach.

Chorus

Who holds himself apart

Lets his pride rise.

Him who despises us

We'll destroy,

And cruelty becomes

His enterprise.

Him who despises us

We'll destroy.

Nieces, Mrs Sedley, Boles, Keene, Swallow, and Hobson join in.

Our curse shall fall on his evil day. We shall

Tame his arrogance -

Ha, ha, ha! We'll make the murderer pay, we'll make him pay -

Peter Grimes! Grimes! him pay, him pay, for his crime!

They scatter in all directions, still shouting.

CURTAIN.

ACT THREE

Scene 2

Scene as in Scene One, some hours later. The dance is over, the Borough is out hunting. Peter alone by his boat under a cloud-swept moon. In this distance a fog horn sounds, and we hear shouting even more distant, but which gradually moves closer as the scene progresses.

Voices

Peter Gri-imes - Peter Gri-imes!
Grimes!

Peter

Steady. There you are. Nearly home.
What is home? Calm as deep water.
Where's my home? Deep in calm water.
Water will drink my sorrows dry
And the tide will turn.

Voices

Grimes!

Peter

Steady. There you are. Nearly home.
The first one died, just died...
The other slipped, and died...
And the third will...
"Accidental circumstances"...
Water will drink his sorrows, my sorrows dry
And the tide will turn.

Voices

Grimes, Peter Grimes

Peter

Peter Grimes. Here you are. Here I am.
Hurry, hurry, hurry, hurry.
Now is gossip put on trial.
Bring the branding iron, and knife.
What's done now is done for life...
Come on! Land me!
Turn the skies back and begin again.

Voices

Peter Grimes.

Peter

Old Joe has gone fishing and
Young Joe has gone fishing and
You'll know who's gone fishing when
You land the next shoal.

Voices

Grimes.

Peter

Ellen, Ellen. Give me your hand, your hand.
There now - my hope is held by you,
If you leave me alone,
If you take away your hand,
The argument's finished,
The friendship's lost,
Gossip is shouting,
Everything's said.

Voices

Peter Grimes.

Peter

To hell with all your mercy.

Voices

Peter Grimes, Peter Grimes.

Peter

To hell with your revenge.
And God have mercy upon you.

Voices

Peter Grimes, Peter Grimes.

Peter

Do you hear them all shouting my name,
D'you hear them? D'you hear them?

Old Davy Jones shall answer
Come home, come home.

Voices

(much nearer)

Peter Grimes.

Peter

Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes!
Ellen and Balstrode enter and watch. Ellen approaches Peter.

Ellen

(as Peter ignores her)

Peter, we've come to take you home.
O come home out of this dreadful night.
See, here's Balstrode. Peter, don't you hear me?

Peter

(oblivious)

What harbour shelters peace
Away from tidal waves,
Away from storms!
What harbour can embrace
Terrors and tragedies?
Her breast is harbour too -
Where night is turned to day.

Balstrode

(approaching Peter)

Come on, I'll help you with the boat now.

Ellen

No.

Balstrode

Sail out till you lose sight of land, then sink the boat.

D'you hear: sink her.

Good-bye, Peter.

Together, they push the boat down to the water as the orchestra begins to play for the first time in this scene. Balstrode returns and waves good-bye. Ellen sobs quietly, and he comforts her, and leads her home. It is dawn. A candle is lit in a window. A shutter is drawn back. Hobson and the posse meet on the green by the Moot Hall. They gossip, shake their heads, indicating the hopelessness of their search. They extinguish their lanterns. Some head home, other to their boats. WOMEN bring nets down from the houses to the boats. Others open their front doors and scrub the steps. Dr. CRABBE appears with his black bag, yawning. The Rector goes into the church for early morning prayer. Mrs. Sedley follows him. Keene opens the shutters of his shop. Swallow approaches the fishermen.

Chorus

To those who pass, the Boro' sounds betray
The cold beginning of another day,
And houses sleeping by the waterside
Wake to the measured
ripple of the tide...

Swallow

There's a boat sinking out at sea,
Coastguard reports.

Fishermen

Within reach?

Swallow

No.

The Fishermen and Swallow go to the beach and peer out at the water. One of them has a glass. The Nieces emerge and polish the brasses outside The Boar.

Chorus

Or measured cadence of the lads who tow
Some entered hoy to fix her in her row,
Or hollow sound that from the passing bell
To some departed spirit bids farewell.

Auntie

What is it?

Boles

Nothing I can see.

Auntie

One of these rumours.

Chorus

(as the CURTAIN slowly FALLS)

In ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide.
Flowing, it fills the channel broad and wide,
Then to sea with strong, majestic sweep
It rolls in back ebb, yet terrible and deep.