

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

**PETER
GRIMES**



BOOSEY AND HAWKES

FGM. 2. 2. 2.

PETER GRIMES

AN OPERA IN THREE ACTS
AND A PROLOGUE

derived from the poem

of George Crabbe

Words by

MONTAGU SLATER

Music by

BENJAMIN BRITTEN

1945

Boosey & Hawkes

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THE opera is derived from George Crabbe's poem, "The Borough," inasmuch as the story and many of the characters are to be found in Crabbe, but what Crabbe sketched broadly has, of course, been elaborated in the libretto. Textually the libretto bears practically no relation to Crabbe, the only quotations being part of the first and all of the final chorus.

The Borough, as described by Crabbe, is a small fishing and ship-building town on the East Coast. Crabbe sets himself to examine the Borough from all aspects, entitling the main sections of his poem 'The Church,' 'Sects and Professions in Religion,' 'Professions (Law, Physic),' 'Trades,' 'Amusements,' 'Inns,' 'the Poor of the Borough,' 'Prisons,' 'Schools,' and little by little, character by character, assembling a picture of the whole life of a nineteenth century town.

The main characters of the opera reflect the Borough's activities. The Rector, Mr. Horace Adams, is one, Crabbe says, who had

" . . . some desire to rise
But not enough to make him enemies
He ever aimed to please, and to offend
Was ever cautious ; for he sought a friend ;
Yet for the friendship never much would pay,
Content to bow, be silent, and obey,
And by a soothing suff'rance find his way."

Round him, of course, we find the widows and maiden ladies—

" To ancient females his devoirs were paid . . .
The easy follower in the female train,
Led without love, and captive without chain."

In the opera, this group of gossips and scandalmongers is typified by Mrs. Sedley, sometimes called Mrs. Nabob—one who takes an interest in her neighbours :

" While the town small-talk flows from lip to lip ;
Intrigues half-gathered, conversation-scrap,
Kitchen cabals, and nursery mishaps."

Crabbe, in his preface, goes out of his way to apologise for the unfriendliness of his portrait of Swallow, the lawyer, Coroner and wealthy burgher of the Borough.

" The people cursed him, but in times of need
Trusted in one so certain to succeed :
By law's dark by-ways he had stored his mind
With wicked knowledge how to cheat mankind."

These, with the retired sea-captain Balstrode, a solid, sensible, charitable figure, are the leading citizens of the town.

In the section called 'Inns,' Crabbe deals with the Borough's less reputable side, and particularly with 'The Boar,' whose landlady is nicknamed 'Auntie,' for a good reason.

" Shall I pass by the *Boar*?—there are who cry,
' Beware the Boar,' and pass determined by :
Those dreadful tusks, those little peering eyes
And churning chaps, are tokens to the wise.
There dwells a kind old aunt, and there you see
Some kind young nieces in her company ;
Poor village nieces, whom the tender dame
Invites to town, and gives their beauty fame."

' Auntie ' has a fellow-tradesman in Ned Keene, the apothecary, of whose deluded clients Crabbe says—

" Though he could neither reason, write, nor spell,
They yet had hope his trash would make them well ;
And while they scorned his parts, they took his oxymel."

Among the poor folk of the town is the lovable Ellen Orford, a widow and the Borough schoolmistress, who sums up her own character—

" . . . I look'd around,
And in my school a bless'd subsistence found—
My winter-calm of life : to be of use
Would pleasant thoughts and heavenly hopes produce."

As for the poor Methodist fisherman, Bob Boles—

" He rails, persuades, explains, and moves the will
By fierce bold words, and strong mechanic skill."

In this Borough of simple and very ordinary people, Peter Grimes fits uneasily. He is a fisherman—visionary, ambitious, impetuous and frustrated—poaching and fishing without caution or care for consequences, and with only one friend in the town, the schoolmistress Ellen Orford. He is determined to make enough money to ask her to marry him, though too proud to ask her till he has lived down his unpopularity and remedied his poverty.

The Prologue which opens the opera shows Peter under cross-examination—practically on trial—for the death of his apprentice during a recent fishing-trip. The inquest is conducted by Swallow, who clearly shares the general fear and mistrust of Grimes, but dismisses him with a warning from lack of evidence. In Act I, Peter is faced with the impossibility of working his boat without help, but Ned Keene brings news of having found him a new apprentice at the workhouse, and, braving the

antagonism of the Borough, Ellen Orford agrees to accompany the carrier in to the Market Town, to bring the boy home to Peter.

The Borough is on that part of the East Coast where the encroachment of the sea makes coast erosion and landslides a very real danger when gales swell the high tides of the equinox. Peter's troubles are quickly forgotten when a storm breaks, bringing fears of flood and destruction.

The next scene shows 'The Boar' that night, where some of the fisherfolk are sheltering from the storm howling outside. The coast road has been flooded, and the carrier's cart, bringing Ellen and the boy, has been delayed. Peter comes into the pub to wait for them. There are drunken brawls, and the news comes that a landslide has swept part of the cliff away up by Peter's hut. Despite the storm and the floods, the carrier reaches the Borough, and amid the hostile mutterings of the fisherfolk, Peter takes the boy out into the gale to his desolate hut.

Act 2 begins later in the summer, on a Sunday morning, sunlit and calm in contrast with the storm and terror of the previous act. Ellen comes with the boy to sit and enjoy the sun by the sea, outside the parish church, but she soon realises, from tears in his clothing, and bruises on his neck, that Peter has begun to ill-treat him, and when Peter arrives, her questions lead to a quarrel. Ellen is in despair that their plan of re-establishing Peter in the eyes of the Borough by hard work, successful fishing and good care of the boy should have failed, and Peter furiously drives the boy off to launch for a shoal that he has observed out at sea.

The quarrel has roused the Borough—Mrs. Sedley has overheard the conversation about Peter's brutality towards the boy—and after an outburst of indignation, the townsfolk follow the Rector and Swallow off to Peter's hut to find out the truth. The next scene follows immediately, as Peter forces the boy into his hut, roughly ordering him to get ready for fishing. Relenting, he tries to soothe the boy's terror of him, and pictures what their life might be like if all goes well.

His language grows wilder and wilder, foreshadowing his eventual madness, and when the Borough is heard climbing up the road to the hut, he loses his head, and chases the boy out of the cliff-side door. The boy slips and falls : Peter climbs

swiftly down after him as the men reach the hut. The Rector and Swallow are surprised and taken aback to discover only a neat, empty hut.

Act 3 takes place a few nights later, when the town is gay with a dance in progress at the Moot Hall. There is a steady passage of males between the Hall and 'The Boar,' and the nieces are in great demand. Mrs. Sedley hails Ned Keene, to tell him her own theories about what has happened to Peter and his boy, who have been missing for some days. She overhears Ellen tell Balstrode about a jersey found washed up on the beach, and summons the men to hunt for Grimes. They scatter, calling and searching for him.

A few hours later, there is a thick fog, and only the calls of the people at their manhunt, and the sound of a fog-horn, break the silence, as Peter staggers in, weary and demented, shrieking back in answer to the voices. Ellen finds him, and tries to soothe him, but he is beyond help: she fetches Balstrode, who tells him to take out his boat, row beyond sight of land, and go down with it. Peter does as he is told, and Balstrode leads Ellen away.

The dawn is breaking as the men come back from their fruitless search, and disperse. A new day begins in the town, with its unchanging routine of tasks. Word comes from the coastguard-station of a boat sinking far out at sea, but nothing can be seen from the Borough, and the people dismiss it as a rumour, and go on with their work.

It remains to add a note on the form of the libretto and its setting. The form—a four-beat line with half rhymes—seemed appropriate for the quick conversational style of the recitatives. The prologue, however, is written in prose.

In the original production by Sadlers Wells we indulged in a calculated inaccuracy in the setting. Historically, Crabbe and the poem belong to the last years of the 18th century: we have set the opera in the early years of the 19th. There is a time-lag between a change of ideas and mode of life and its reflection on costume. If it is thought Crabbe was ahead of his time and anticipated the spirit and the problems of the 19th century, then it seems sensible to dress the opera in 19th century clothes.

CHARACTERS

PETER GRIMES, a fisherman	<i>Tenor</i>
BOY, his apprentice	<i>Silent</i>
ELLEN ORFORD, a widow, schoolmistress of the Borough	<i>Soprano</i>
CAPTAIN BALSTRODE, retired merchant skipper	<i>Baritone</i>
AUNTIE, landlady of "The Boar"	<i>Contralto</i>
NIECE 1 } NIECE 2 } main attractions of "The Boar"	<i>Soprano</i>
ROBERT BOLES, fisherman and Methodist	<i>Tenor</i>
SWALLOW, a lawyer	<i>Bass</i>
Mrs. (NABOB) SEDLEY, a rentier widow of an East India Company's factor	<i>Soprano</i>
Rev. HORACE ADAMS, the rector	<i>Tenor</i>
NED KEENE, apothecary and quack	<i>Baritone</i>
Dr. CRABBE	<i>Silent</i>
HOBSON, carrier	<i>Bass</i>

CHORUS of townspeople and fisherfolk.

SCENE: The Borough, a small fishing town on the East Coast.

TIME: Towards 1830.

PROLOGUE

Interior of the Moot House arranged as for Coroner's Inquest. Coroner, Mr. SWALLOW at table on dais, clerk at table below. A crowd of townspeople in the body of the hall is kept back by HOBSON acting as Constable. Mr. SWALLOW is the leading lawyer of the Borough and at the same time its Mayor and its Coroner. A man of unexceptionable career and talents he nevertheless disturbs the burghesses by his air of a man with an arriere pensee.

HOBSON : (*shouts*) 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 at London. Why did you do this ?

PETER : We had 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 amongst the fish.

SWALLOW : What did you do ?

PETER : Threw them overboard and sailed 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.

Allright, 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 abusing a respectable lady.

PETER glares.

SWALLOW : 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 ! !

SWALLOW : Mrs. Sedley here.

PETER : (*fiercely*) I don't like interferers.

A slight hubbub 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 : When someone prays he shuts his eyes
And so 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—
callous, brutal, coarse ? (*to Grimes*) There's something
here perhaps in your favour. I'm told you rescued this
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 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 hubbub begins again.

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

PETER : Stand down you say. You wash your hands.
The case goes on in people's minds
And charges that no court has made
Will be shouted at my head.
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.

He shouts this excitedly against the hubbub chorus.

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 ?

Against them all CONSTABLE HOBSON shouts his :

HOBSON : Clear the court.

*SWALLOW rises with slow dignity. EVERY-
BODY stands up while he makes his ceremonial exit.*

The crowd then begins to go out.

PETER and ELLEN are left alone.

PETER : The truth—the pity—and the truth.

ELLEN : Peter, come home !

PETER : Where the walls themselves
Gossip of inquest.

ELLEN : But we will gossip, too,
And eat 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.

BOTH : Your voice out of the pain,
Is like a hand
That I can feel and know :
Here is a friend.

They walk off slowly as the

CURTAIN FALLS

ACT ONE

SCENE I. *Street by the sea : Mote Hall exterior with its outside staircase, next door to which is "The Boar." Ned Keene's apothecary's 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 fisherman 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 fisherman 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 :

CHORUS : Oh hang at open doors the 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 with 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 : O her vats flow with poisoned gin.

BOLES the methodist fisherman stands aside from all this dram drinking.

FISHERMAN : Boles has gone Methody. (*points and laughs*).

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 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 your 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 swing door closes*). He drinks 'Good Health' to all diseases.

FISHERWOMAN : Storm ?

2nd FISHER : 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 FISHERS :

And if the Springtide eats the land again
Till even the cottages and cobbled walks of fishermen
Are billets for the thievish 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 shop door.

RECTOR : (*right and left*). Good morning, good morning.

NIECES : Good morning.

Mrs. SEDLEY : 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.

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.

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

PETER : (*calls off*). Hi. Give us a hand

CHORUS stops.

PETER : Haul the boat !

BOLES : (*shouts back*). Haul it yourself, Grimes.

PETER : (*off*). Somebody bring the rope.

Nobody does. Presently he appears and takes 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.

Going to capstan.

NED : We'll drown the gossips in a tidal storm.

GRIMES goes back to the boat. BALSTRODE and KEENE turn 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.

NED: 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, 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: }
 NED: } The tide that floods will ebb, the tide, the
 tide will turn.
The boat is hauled up. GRIMES appears.
 NED: Grimes, you won't need help from now.
 I've got a prentice for you.
 BALSTRODE: A workhouse brat?
 NED: 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.
 (*souts*). Jim Hobson, we've a job for you.
 HOBSON: (*enters*). Cart's full sir. More than I can do.
 NED: Listen, Jim. You'll go to the workhouse
 And ask for Mr. Ned Keene's purchase.
 Bring him back to Grimes.
 HOBSON: Cart's full sir. I have no room.
 NED: 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?
 NED: 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 Grime's messenger?
 ELLEN: Whatever you say I'm not ashamed.
 Somebody must do the job.
 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.
 NED: 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 lonely finds delight
 In shouldering care.
 ELLEN: (*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 Ned*). Have you my pills ?
NED : I'm sorry mum.
Mrs. SEDLEY : My sleeping draught.
NED : 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—
NED : Meet us both at this pub, "The Boar"
Auntie's we call it. It's quite safe.
Mrs. SEDLEY : I've never been in a pub in my life.
NED : You'll come ?
Mrs. SEDLEY : Allright.
NED : Tonight ?
Mrs. SEDLEY : Allright.
She moves off up the street.
NED : If the old dear takes much more landanum
She'll land herself one day in Bedlam !
BALSTRODE : (*looks seaward through his glass*).
Look ! the storm cone !
The wind veers
In from the sea
At gale force.
CHORUS : 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
ALL : Now the flood tide
And the 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 springtide's here
With a gale behind.

- CHORUS : Is there much to fear ?
NED : 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 !
NED : And keep your wife upstairs.
OMNES : O Tide that waits for no man
Spare our coasts.

There is a GENERAL EXEUNT—mostly through the swing doors of "The Boar." Dr. CRABBE'S hat blows away, is rescued for him by NED 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 block and spars and rope
Why not try the wider sea
With merchantman or privateer ?
PETER : I'm a native, rooted here.
BALSTRODE : Rooted by what ?

PETER : By familiar fields,
Marsh and sand,
Ordinary streets,
The 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 little games
Mother stops him with the 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 Crowner sits to
Hint, but not to mention crimes,
And publishes an open verdict
Whispered 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,
Plunged into the waves
Shuddering challenge
Then the sea rose to a storm
Over the gunwales,
And the child'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 a 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.
The 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.

BALSTRODE : Man—go and 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 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 storm
What harbour can embrace
Terrors and tragedies?
With her there'll be no quarrels,
With her the mood will stay,
Her breast is harbour too
Where night is turned to day.

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

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2. *Interior of "The Boar," typical main room of 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. They both push the door closed.*

AUNTIE: Past time to close.

Mrs. SEDLEY: He said half-past ten.

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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: This 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 alright.

AUNTIE: (*nods her head towards Mrs. SEDLEY*). Sh-h-h.

BALSTRODE: Sorry. I didn't see you, missis.
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?

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

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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 !
 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 attraction 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 they have found time to don each 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.
 { We'll all be drowned.
 I wouldn't mind if it didn't howl.
 BALSTRODE : D'you think we
 Would stop our storm for such as you—
 Coming all over palpitations !
 Auntie, get some new relations.
 AUNTIE : (*takes it ill*).
 Loud man, I never did have time
 For the sort of creature who spits in his wine.
 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
 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.

1st 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.
 AUNTIE : (*cold*). Turn that man out.
 BALSTRODE : Auntie, 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'll live and let live
And look, we keep our hands to ourselves.

BOLES struggles to his feet, BALSTRODE sits him down again, laying the law down.

BALSTRODE : Pub conversation should depend
On this eternal moral ;
That satire never should 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.
We live and let live, and look
We keep our hands to ourselves.

And chorus as before.

Door opens. The struggle with the wind is worse than before as NED KEENE gets through.

NED : Have you heard the cliff is down
Up by Grimes's hut ?

AUNTIE : Where is he ?

Mrs. SEDLEY : Thank God you've come.

NED : You won't blow away.

Mrs. SEDLEY : That 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.

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

Mrs. SEDLEY : With drunken females and in brawls !

NED : They're auntie's nieces, that's what they are
And better than you for kissing, ma.
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.

CHORUS : Talk of the devil and there he is
And a devil he is, and a devil he is.
Grimes is waiting his apprentice.

GRIMES advances into the room shaking off the raindrops from his hair. Mrs. SEDLEY faints.

NED KEENE catches her as she falls.

NED : Get the brandy, aunt.

AUNTIE : Who'll pay ?

NED : Her. I'll charge her for it.

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

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

No-one answers. Silence is broken by PETER, as if thinking aloud.

PETER : 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 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 ?

2 NIECES : His song alone would sour the beer.

CHORUS : His temper's up.
 O chuck him out.

2 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 has no hold on me.

BALSTRODE : Leave him alone, you drunkard there.
Goes to get hold of BOLES.

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

PETER : (*as the drunk 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 in fragments on the floor.*

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

BALSTRODE : For peace sake, somebody start a song.

ALL : Old Joe has gone fishing and
 Young Joe has gone fishing and
 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 comes into the round : the others stop*).

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

(*This breaks the round, but the others recover in a
 repeat*)

*At the climax of the round the door opens to admit
 ELLEN ORFORD, the BOY and the CARRIER.
 ALL THREE are soaking, muddy and bedraggled.*

HOBSON : The bridge is down, we half swam over.
 NED : And your cart ? Is it seaworthy ?

*The WOMEN go to ELLEN and the BOY.
 AUNTIE fusses over them. BOLES reproaches.*

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 : (*admiring*). Nice sweet thing.

ELLEN : (*protecting him*). 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.

The BOY hesitates, ELLEN leads him to PETER.

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

OMNES : Home ? Do you call that home ?

PETER takes the boy out of the door into the storm.

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

SCENE I. *Scene as in Act One. The Street.*

A fine sunny morning, some weeks later.

The street is deserted till 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 late-comers 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 voluntary in church.

Shall we not go to church this Sunday
And do our knitting by the sea ?

Hymn starts in church.

CHORUS : 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 : I'll do the work. You talk.
 Nothing to tell me.
 Nothing to say ? Then shall I
 Tell you what your life was like, and you
 See if I'm right. I believe
 You liked your workhouse with its grave
 Empty look. Perhaps you weren't
 So unhappy in your loneliness.

When first I 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.

She goes on with her work. JOHN says nothing.

CHORUS : (off). May he restrain our tongues from strife
 And 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.

Hymn continues, third verse.

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

Morning prayer begins. The Rector's voice is heard.

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

CONGREGATION : Almighty and most merciful Father, we
 have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.

The prayer continues through the ensuing scene.

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 ? What
 Are you trying to hide ?

CHOIR : (*in church*)
 O, Lord open Thou our lips
 And our mouth shall show forth thy praise
 O God make speed to save us
 O Lord make haste to help us.
 ELLEN *undoes the neck of shirt.*

ELLEN : A bruise.
 Well . . . It's begun.

CHOIR : (*in church*)
 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.

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

CHOIR : (*off*). Praise ye the Lord.
 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's.
 Storm and all its terrors are
 Nothing to the hearts despair
 After storm will come a sleep
 Like oceans deep.

CHOIR : (*off*). O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord
 O ye Sun and Moon, bless ye the Lord
 O ye Stars of Heaven, bless ye the Lord
 O ye Winds of God, bless ye the Lord,
 Praise Him and magnify Him for ever.
 PETER GRIMES *enters.*

CHOIR : (*off*). 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 for ever.

PETER : Come boy.

ELLEN : Peter—what for ?

CHOIR : (*off*). 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 for ever.

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

ELLEN : But if there were then all the boats
 Would fast be launching.

PETER : I can find
 The shoals to which the rest are blind.

CHOIR : (*off*). 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 for ever.

ELLEN : This is a 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 at endless work
 Painting boat and mending nets,
 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, Peter, Hush !

CHOIR : (*off*). 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 for ever.

As it was in the beginning is now and ever shall
be,
World without end. Amen.

The sound dies down. In Church the lesson is being read.

ELLEN : Peter, your unrelenting work
This grey, unresting industry,
What aim, what future does it mark
What peace will your hard profits buy ?

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

CHOIR : (*in church*).
I Believe in God the Father
God the Son and God the Holy
Ghost, and in Jesus Christ his only son . . .

Fades into 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 in what we planned
To do. Were we right, were we right ?

PETER : Take away your hand.
(*then 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 : (*in anger*).
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' tale,
With all the fish from all the seas.
We were mistaken to have dreamed
Peter. We've failed. We've failed.

*He cries out as if in agony. Then strikes her. The
basket falls.*

PETER : So be it !—And God have mercy upon me !
*The boy 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 NED KEENE, finally BOLES.*

AUNTIE : Fool to let it come to this
Wasting pity, squandering tears

NED : 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 thro' crazy eyes.

NED : Grimes is at his exercise.

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

ALL : Parson, lawyer, clerk at prayers.

*In Church the Benediction.
Then congregation emerges.*

NED, ROBERT and AUNTIE :
Now the church parade begins
Fresh beginning for fresh sins
Ogling with a pious gaze
Each one's at his exercise.

DOCTOR CRABBE comes first.

AUNTIE : Doctor !
 NED Leave him out of this.
 Mrs. SEDLEY : (*from church*). What is it ?
 NED : Private business.
 Mrs. SEDLEY : I heard two voices during psalms
 One was Grimes, and one more calm.
 BOLES : (*to a fisherwoman as she comes out*).
 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, BOLES and NED :
 What do you suppose ?
 Grimes is at his exercise.

*As people come out two by two they circulate the
 village green singing their couplets as they reach the centre.
 First come SWALLOW and a fellow lawyer.*

CHORUS : What is it ? What do you suppose
 Grimes is at his exercise.
 FELLOW LAWYER : Dullards build their self-esteem
 By inventing cruelties.
 SWALLOW : Even so, the law restrains
 Too impetuous enterprise.
 FISHERWOMEN : (*chorus*).
 Fishing is a lonely trade
 Single men have much to bear.
 1st and 2nd NIECES : If a man's work cannot be made
 Decent, let him stay ashore.
 CHORUS : (*over all*). What is it ? What do you suppose
 Grimes is at his exercise.

BALSTRODE pauses by NED as he walks round.

RECTOR : My flock—oh what a weight is this
 My burden pastoral.
 Mrs. SEDLEY : And what a dangerous faith is this
 Which gives souls equality !
 BALSTRODE : When the Borough gossip starts
 Somebody must suffer for it.
 NED : And thanks to flinty human hearts
 Even quacks can make a profit.
 CHORUS : What is it ? What do you suppose ?
 Grimes is at his exercise.

*During the hubbub BOLES climbs a little way up the
 steps of the Moot Hall.*

BOLES : People— . . . No. I will speak . . .
 This thing here concerns you all.
 CHORUS : (*crowding round Boles*).
 Whoever's guilty gets the rap
 The Borough keeps its standards up.
 BALSTRODE : Tub-thumping.
 BOLES : O this prentice system
 Is uncivilised, unchristian.
 BALSTRODE : Something of the sort befits
 Brats conceived outside the sheets.
 BOLES : Where's the parson in his black ?
 Is he there 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 comes in. She is met by Auntie who has
 picked up ELLEN's abandoned 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 in his cruel games.

RECTOR : (*holding his hand up 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
There lives were stark.

RECTOR : You planned to be wordly-wise
But your souls were dark.

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

SWALLOW : You planned to heal sick souls
With bodily care.

Mrs. SEDLEY : O little care you for the prentice
Or his welfare !

BOLES : Call it danger, call it hardship
Or plain murder !

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 and BALSTRODE :
O Lord, hard hearts !

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

OMNES : (*without Ellen, Auntie and Balstrode*).
Tried to be kind !
Murder !
Tried to be kind and to help
Murder !

RECTOR : Swallow—shall we go and see Grimes in his
home ?

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 have a clue.

CHORUS : Now we shall find out the worst.

RECTOR : Only the men, the women stay.

SWALLOW : (*Points to the nieces who join the crowd*).
No ragtail no bobtail if you please.

BOLES : (*pushes them away*).
Back to the gutter—you keep out of this.

RECTOR : Mr. Swallow. Come along.

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

CHORUS : To Grimes's hut !
To Grimes's hut !

*He leads the way. Mrs. SEDLEY and SWALLOW
come next. BALSTRODE lags behind. Behind
them come the rest of the crowd.*

CHORUS : 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 whisperer stands out
Now confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife :
What's done now is done for life.

AUNTIE, NIECES and ELLEN remain.

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
And we soothe their fears away
NIECES : We know they'll whistle their good-byes
Next fine day and put to sea.
ELLEN : On the manly calendar
We only mark heroic days.
ALL : Shall we smile or shall we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep ?
ELLEN : They are children when they weep
We are mothers when they strive
Schooling our own hearts to keep
The bitter treasure of their love.
ALL : Shall we smile or shall we weep
Or wait quietly till they sleep ?

CURTAIN

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 (back centre) opens on the cliff, the other downstage, opens on the road. The BOY 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 !
Here's your sea boots. Take those bright
And fancy buckles off your feet.

HE throws the sea boots down in front of the boy.
Here's your oilskin and sou-wester.
Stir your pins we must get ready.
Here's the jersey that she knitted
With the anchor that she patterned.

HE throws the clothes to the boy. They fall on the floor round him. The BOY is crying silently. PETER shakes his shoulder.

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

PETER opens the cliff-side door and looks out.
Look. Now is your chance.
The whole sea's boiling. Get the nets.
Come boy.
They listen to money
These Borough gossips.
Only to money
I'll fish the sea dry
And flood the market.
Now is our chance to get a good catch
Get money to choke
Down rumour's throat.
Grimes will set up—
With house and home and shop
I'll marry, I'll marry Ellen,
I'll . . .

HE turns to see the boy still sitting on the rope coil, weeping. He helps him off with his coat. He picks up the jersey.

Coat off. Jersey on
We're going into the sea my son.

The BOY is still weeping.

PETER changes tone and breaks into another song.

In dreams I've built myself some kindlier home
Warm in my heart and in a golden calm
When there is no more fear and no more storm.
And she would soon forget her schoolhouse ways
Forget the labour of our 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 :
Fruit in the garden, children by the shore
And whitened doorstep, and a woman's care.
But dreaming builds what dreaming can disown.
Dead fingers are stretched out to tear it down.
I hear those voices that will not be drowned
Calling, there is no peace, there is no stone
In the earth's thickness to make you a home,
That you can build with and remain alone.

*He stops. The boy watches him in fascinated horror :
and PETER turns on him suddenly.*

Sometimes I see that boy here in this hut.
He's there now, I can see him, he is there
His eyes are on me as they were that evil day.

He stares into vacancy.

Stop moaning boy. What's that ? Water ?
There's no water. You had the last yesterday.
We'll soon be home
In harbour calm and deep.

*In the distance can be heard the song of the neighbours
coming up the hill.*

CHORUS : (*off*). 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.

PETER goes to the street door and looks out.

PETER : There's an odd procession here.
Parson with Swallow coming near.

CHORUS : (*off*). Now the whisperer stands out
To be confronted by the fact.
Bring the branding iron and knife
What's done now is done for life.

*The BOY doesn't move. PETER flings the other
door open. Suddenly he turns on the boy.*

PETER : Wait. You've been talking.
You and that bitch were gossiping.
What lies have you been telling ?
The Borough's climbing up the road.
To get me. Me ! O I'm not scared
I'll send them off with a flea in their ear.
I'll show them. Grimes ahoy !
You sit there silently.
And you're the cause of everything
Your eyes, like his watching me
With an idiot's drooling gaze.
Will you move
Or shall I make you dance ?

Step boldly. For here's the way we go to sea
To find that shoal, to find that shoal
That's boiling in the sea.
Be careful, or you'll break your neck
Down the cliff-side to the deck.

Rope in hand he drives the BOY towards the cliff door.

Come on! I'll pitch the stuff down.

Pitches ropes and nets.

Now

Shut your eyes and down you go.

There is a knocking at the other door. PETER turns towards it, then retreats. Meanwhile the BOY climbs out. When PETER is between the two doors the BOY screams and falls out of sight. PETER runs to the cliff door, feels for his grip and then swings after him.

The cliff side door is open. The street door still resounds with the Rector's knock. Then it opens and the Rector puts his head round the door.

RECTOR: Peter Grimes! Nobody here?

SWALLOW: What about the other door?

They go and look out. Silence for a moment.

RECTOR: Was this a recent landslide?

SWALLOW: Yes.

RECTOR: It makes almost a precipice.
How deep?

SWALLOW: Say forty feet.

RECTOR: Dangerous to have the door open.

NED: 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 is skill.

SWALLOW draws the moral.

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's 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 close the door.

THEY GO OUT—all save BALSTRODE who has come in late who goes to the cliff side door, looks down, then closes it carefully.

ACT THREE

SCENE I. *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 passage—of the males at any rate—from the Moot Hall to the Inn.

The stage is empty when the CURTAIN RISES but presently there is a little squeal and one of the nieces scampers down the exterior staircase of the Moot Hall, closely followed by SWALLOW. They haven't got very far before the other niece appears at the top of the Moot Hall stairs.

A Barn dance is being played in the Moot Hall.

SWALLOW: (to Niece I).

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

BOTH NIECES: Together we are safe
As any wedded wife.
Safety in numbers lies
A man is always lighter
His conversation 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

NIECES : Her stay of execution.
Save us from lonely men
They're like a broody hen
With habits but with no ideas ;
But given choice of pleasures
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 : Pairing is 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 tete-a-tete'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.

NIECE 2 : 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 Inn door.

NIECE is about to enter when—

NIECE : They're all watching. I must wait
Until Auntie's turned her back.

*She runs away to join her Sister and leaves
SWALLOW holding the door open.*

SWALLOW : Bah !

He goes in the Boar alone.

The Barn Dance stops—applause.

*The sisters are half way up stairs when NED KEENE
COMES OUT of the Moot Hall at the top of the
stairs THEY fly, giggling, and hide behind one of the
boats on the shore. (Three boats can be seen as at
the end of Act One).*

NED: (*calls after them*). Ahoy.

*He is halfway to their hiding place when a peremptory
voice stops him in mid career. Mrs. SEDLEY is at
the top of the Moot Hall stairs.*

A slow waltz starts from the Moot Hall.

Mrs. SEDLEY : Mr. Keene. Can you spare a moment
I've something to say that's more than urgent,
About Peter Grimes and that boy.

She is downstairs by now and has him buttonholed.

Neither of them was seen yesterday.
It's more than suspicion now, it's fact.
The boy's disappeared.

NED: 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.

NED: Old woman. You're far too ready
To yell blue murder. Where's the body ?
If people poke their noses into others' busi-
ness—

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 foul it is . . .
And I'll declare it.

NED: (*who is getting bored, thirsty and angry*).

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

Mrs. SEDLEY: (*like a cross-examining counsel*).
Has Peter Grimes been seen?

NED: He's away.

Mrs. SEDLEY: And the boy?

NED: They're fishing likely.

Mrs. SEDLEY: Has his boat been in?

NED: Why should it?

Mrs. SEDLEY: His hut abandoned.

NED: I'm dry. Goodnight.

The waltz stops.

*He breaks away from her grasp, goes into "The Boar"
and bangs the door after him.*

*Dr. CRABBE and the RECTOR and other burgesses
come down the Moot Hall stairs. Mrs. SEDLEY
retires into the shadow of the boats.*

A Hornpipe starts from the Moot Hall.

BURGESS: Come along doctor—(*indicates "The Boar:"*)
We're not wanted there, we oldsters.

BURGESSES: Good night—it's time for bed.
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 the roses and leave you the wine.

BURGESSES: Good night! Good night! Good night,
good people, good night!

RECTOR: Goodnight, Dr. Crabbe, all good friends
goodnight.

Don't let the ladies keep company too late
Give my love to the girls, wish luck to the men
I'll water my roses and leave you the wine.

HE GOES OUT waving.

BURGESSES: Good night! Good night! Good night,
good people, goodnight!

The Hornpipe fades out.

Mrs. SEDLEY: (*still in the boat shadow, goes on with her
brooding*):

Crime, which my hobby is
Sweetens my thinking.
Men who can breach the peace
And kill convention—
So many guilty ghosts
With stealthy body
Trouble my midnight thoughts . . .

*ELLEN and BALSTRODE come up slowly from
the beach. It is clear they have been in earnest talk.
As they approach BALSTRODE shines his lantern
on the name of the nearest boat: BOY BILLY.*

Mrs. SEDLEY' doesn't show herself.

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: (*holds out the boy's jersey*).
This I found
Down by the tide-mark.

*It is getting dark. To see the garment properly
BALSTRODE holds it to his lantern.*

BALSTRODE : The boy's ?

ELLEN : My broidered anchor on the chest.
(meditative).
Embroidery in childhood was
A luxury of idleness
A coil of silken thread that gave
Dreams of a silk and satin life.
Now my embroidery 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 embroidery affords
A clue whose meaning we avoid.

*The jersey is wet. BALSTRODE wrings the water
out.*

BALSTRODE : We'll find him, maybe give a hand.

ELLEN : We have no power to help him now.

BALSTRODE : We have the power. We have the power.

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

ELLEN : We shall be there with him.

BALSTRODE : Nothing to do but wait
Now the solution
Is beyond life—beyond
Dissolution.

They go out together.

*When they have gone Mrs. SEDLEY goes quickly to
the inn door.*

Mrs. SEDLEY : *(calling through the door).*
Mr. Swallow, Mr. Swallow.
I want the lawyer Swallow.

AUNTIE : *(off).* 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 all such nuisances.

Mrs. SEDLEY : This is an insult.

AUNTIE : You will find
So long as I'm here I speak my mind.

Mrs. SEDLEY : I'll have you know your place.
You baggage !

AUNTIE : My customers come here for peace
They take their drink, they take their case !

SWALLOW : *(coming out).* What is the matter.

AUNTIE : *(goes in and bangs door).* Good night !

Mrs. SEDLEY : *(points dramatically).* Look !

SWALLOW : I'm short-sighted you know.

Mrs. SEDLEY : It's Grime's boat, back at last !

SWALLOW : That's different. Hey.
Shouts into "The Boar."

Is Hobson there ?

HOBSON : *(off).* Ay, Ay, sir.

Mrs. SEDLEY : Good, now things are moving; and about
time too !

HOBSON appears.

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 that he's out at sea.

SWALLOW : (*points*). But here's his boat.

HOBSON : 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.

He goes into "The Boar" hailing.

Mrs. SEDLEY : Crime—that's my hobby—is
By cities hoarded.
Rarely are country minds
Lifted to murder
The noblest of the crimes
Which are my study.
And now the crime is here
And I am ready.

HOBSON comes out with BOLES and other fishermen.

*When the news reaches the Moor Hall and Pub, the
people crowd on to the beach.*

CHORUS : Who holds himself apart
Lets his pride rise
Him who despises us
We'll destroy.

*With two NIECES, Mrs. SEDLEY, BOLES,
KEENE, SWALLOW, HOBSON.*

And cruelty becomes
His enterprise

Him who despises us
We'll destroy.

Our curse shall fall upon his evil day. We shall
Tame his arrogance.

We'll make the murderer pay for his crime.

Peter Grimes ! Grimes !

The people (still shouting) scatter in all directions.

CURTAIN.

SCENE 2. *Scene as in Scene One.*

Some hours later.

*The dance is over, the Borough is out hunting. PETER
alone by his boat in the changeful light of a cloud-swept
moon.*

There is a distant fog horn.

(The orchestra is silent).

As before we can hear shouting, now in the far distance :
" Peter Gri-imes—Peter Gri-imes."

VOICES : 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 dry
And the tide will turn.

VOICES : Grimes, Peter Grimes.

PETER : Peter Grimes. Here you are. Here I am.
Hurry, hurry.
Now is gossip put on trial
Bring the branding iron, the 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 had 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. Give me your hand.
There now—my hope is held by you,
If you take it away. . . .
Take away your hand. . . .
The argument's finished
Friendship is lost
Gossip is shouting
Everything's said.

VOICES : Peter Grimes.

PETER : To hell with all your mercy
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?
Old Davy Jones will answer
Come home, come home.

VOICES : (*close at hand*). Peter Grimes.

PETER : (*roars back at them*). Peter Grimes! Peter Grimes.

*ELLEN and BALSTRODE have come in and
stand watching. Then ELLEN goes up to PETER.*

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

*PETER does not notice her and sings in a tone almost
like prolonged sobbing. The voices shouting "Peter
Grimes" can still be heard but more distantly and
more sweetly.*

PETER : 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 : (*Goes up to Peter*). Come on, I'll help you with
the boat now.

ELLEN : No.

BALSTRODE : Sail out till you lose sight of the Moot Hall,
then sink the boat. You'll know what to do.
Good-bye Peter.

Together they push the boat down the slope of the shore.

*BALSTRODE comes back and waves goodbye. He
takes ELLEN who is sobbing quietly, calms her and
leads her carefully down the main street home.
The men pushing the boat out has been the cue for the
orchestra to return. Now dawn begins.*

*Dawn comes to the Borough by a gentle sequence of
sights and sounds.*

*A candle is lighted and shines through a bare window.
A shutter is drawn back.*

*HOBSON and his posse meet severally on the green by
the Mote Hall. They gossip together, shake their
heads, indicate the hopelessness of the search, ex-
tinguish their lanterns, and while some turn home,
others go to the boats.*

*Nets are brought down from the houses by fisherwives.
Cleaners open the front door of the Inn and begin to
scrub the step.*

Dr. CRABBE comes from a confinement case with his black bag. He yawns and stretches. Nods to the cleaners. The RECTOR comes to early morning prayer.

Mrs. SEDLEY follows.

NED KEENE draws the shutters of his shop.

Mrs. SWALLOW comes out and speaks to the fishermen.

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

FISHERMAN : Within reach ?

SWALLOW : No.

FISHERMAN : Let's have a look through the glasses.

FISHERMEN go with SWALLOW to the beach and look out. One of them has a glass.

AUNTIE : What is it ?

BOLES : Nothing I can spy.

AUNTIE : One of these rumours.

*Nieces emerge and begin to polish the brasses outside
"The Boar."*

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

During the Chorus the CURTAIN slowly falls.