

Let me see thy face again
 Before my life is through.
 Thy child is waiting,
 Little arms outstretched,
 Waiting for you to return
 To clasp him to thy breast.
 Waiting for you to return
 To clasp him to thy breast.

Oh my poor, poor father, what disgrace have I not brought on thee? (*Moving to below chair left*). But William shall marry me—I hold his promise. (*Sinks into chair*). He shall give me back my honour or—or—(*Bursts into tears*).

There is a knock on the door left.

Ah, someone is at the door—perhaps tis he. (*Rises*).

Enter ANNE and TIM left.

ANNE (*crossing to left of MARIA*): Hello, Maria, it's I.

TIM: And it's I, too.

MARIA (*embracing her*): Anne, my sister!

TIM: Yes and Tim, thy brother-in-law that is to be.

ANNE: Shut up, thou big fool! (*To MARIA*) I was going by and called in to see thee.

MARIA: And most welcome you are, dearest Anne and Tim. Come sit down. (*ANNE sits above table and MARIA left*).

TIM (*moving down to cradle*): I'm going to have a look at the baby.

ANNE: Get off with thee—what's thee want with a baby?

TIM: Why, to get my hand in, to be sure.

MARIA (*rising*): Nan, I hope you have kept my secret. So far everyone believes this to be a child I have taken in to nurse. You have told no one different?

ANNE: No, I have told no one—that is except for Tim.

TIM: And I have told no one—that is except for my brother Bob and my sister Meg and they have told no one—that is except for my sixteen cousins and they told no one—that is except for—

ANNE: Oh, thou great fool! But, Maria, I really came to tell thee that Mother and Father said that they would be coming here this very evening.

MARIA (*moving down left*): No, no, they must not come here! (*Facing away from ANNE*). They must not see me in my shame. My mother's grey hair will seem to speak reproaches and tell of her virtuous life, now disgraced by my misdeed. And, Father! I swear that I should die beneath his stern gaze.

ANNE (*rising and moving down to right of MARIA*): Come, cheer up, Maria. It won't be as bad as you think. I have broken the news to our parents.

Maria: What said they?

Anne: Father lifted up his eyes to Heaven and said 'Oh, merciful God, my poor girl then is ruined.'

Maria: And Mother—what said she?

Anne: She cried a great deal at first but then she said that you were still her child, though fallen in sin through a villain's means.

Tim (*calling*): Anne! Maria! Come here, at once, and look at the baby.

MARIA and ANNE run across right.

Maria (*kneeling right of cradle*): What is it? My poor child has been ailing of late. What is the matter?

Tim: It's just opened its mouth!

Maria: Yes?

Tim: And it ain't got no teeth.

Anne: Get along with you, thou old fool, Little 'uns like that don't have no teeth.

Tim: Then how does they eats their bread and butter?

Oh, look, look!!

Maria: What ails it now?

Tim: It's head is as bald as a duck egg. Look now—it's opening its mouth again. Give it the knob of the kitchen poker to suck.

Anne: Tim Bobbin, would 'ee have the baby as big a fool as thee? Thy mother used to give thee the knob of the wooden bedstead to suck and thee'st been wooden-headed ever since (*Taps him on his head with her knuckles*).

Knock at door left.

Maria (*rising*): Who can that be?

Anne: I expect it be the old folks. Us'll be away then. Come along, Tim.

Tim: I want to stop and nurse the baby.

Anne: Nonsense, you'll drop it and give it the gravel rash. Can us go out the back way, Maria? I don't want Mother and Father to know us has been here afore them.

Maria: Of course—this is the way. (*Moving up right followed by ANNE*).

Anne: And you, Tim, leave the baby be and come along afore you frighten the poor little mite out of its senses.

Tim (*as he moves up to ANNE*): I never saw such a funny thing of a little baby afore. It's got no teeth and it's bald-headed. But it's just like William Corder—I can tell by its nose.

Anne (*pulling TIM off right*): Come along, thou old fool!

Exit TIM and ANNE up right. Another knock at the door.

MARIA moves to above cradle.

Maria (*aside*): Oh how I dread the meeting. But heart be firm—they come!