

HARROW ALLEY

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TITLE SEQUENCE.

EXT. BELFRY. DUSK.

An antique bell tolls. The figures of Time and Death wait before two small doors. They fly open. The figures make their brief appearance and chunter back in on their rails. End title sequence as the great bell swings up towards the camera and we are swallowed in its great, black 'O'.

INT. NEWGATE PRISON'S CONDEMNED KEEP. DAY.

Pitch-black. The 'O' begins to reappear like a reversing eclipse. Now it is a manhole cover being laboriously lifted away and set down with a harsh, bell-like clang. A plump turnkey (SMOLLET) appears in the hole, squinting past his flickering candle into the darkness below.

SMOLLET

Ratsey... Ratsey... Gamaliel Ratsey.

RATSEY V/O

Captain Montessor to you. Captain
Montessor, you old belch.

A ladder starts down.

SMOLLET

Up you come.

RATSEY V/O

Is it today?

SMOLLET

Today and now.

A heavy silence indicates Ratsey digesting this. Possibly a small fart, and then the clank of irons as he bestirs himself.

INT. PASSAGE ABOVE KEEP. DAY.

At the centre of the shadowy vault is the manhole. The top of the ladder projects above the rim, before it is a small anvil. Next to SMOLLET is the prison chaplain (FIELDING), a spare, clerical hack. Their attitudes reflect the tedium of routine.

Dirty fettered hands grasp the top of the ladder and GAMALIEL RATSEY heaves himself into view, blinking at the light. A burly, vigorous ruffian and ('till lately) swaggering whore-house bully, his face is filthy and long unshaven. The battered hat atop his lousy head dejectedly sports a raggedy broken feather. His coat and shirt, once fine, are grimy now and foodstained;

one sleeve is ripped at the shoulder, at his throat and wrists are bits of tattered lace. Yet his bearing is not without authority.

SMOLLET puts RATSEY's hands to the anvil and starts tapping them free.

FIELDING

A few words of comfort before we begin the service. Resignation to God's will -

But RATSEY is concerned with matters of greater import.

RATSEY

How's the weather?

SMOLLET

Gorgeous.

RATSEY

(pleased)

Much of a crowd?

SMOLLET

Packed solid from here to Tyburn.

RATSEY

(assumed indifference)

None of the nobility I suppose.

SMOLLET

Au contraire. Most of the court. Feverish with excitement they is. Got a good rousing farewell speech for them?

With a smirk of self-assurance, RATSEY gives SMOLLET a taste.

RATSEY

"Let British pluck match British generosity and we may bid defiance to the world". (conversationally) That's just the start.

SMOLLET

Oh that has a ring to it. They'll be cheering like Bedlams. Ladies swooning. And it's just the start. Legs.

He's referring to RATSEY'S fettered legs with which RATSEY now straddles the anvil, his soiled and laddered stockings drooping about his calves and ankles. He fingers his beard and surveys his attire as SMOLLET resumes work.

FIELDING

A few words of comfort before we begin the service...resignation to God's will -

RATSEY

(to Smollet)

What about a drink? And a razor?

SMOLLET

And a comb? And a needle and thread?

RATSEY

That's the spirit. I can't go out there like this.

SMOLLET

Show me your money.

RATSEY

If I had money would I have spent six weeks in the Condemned Hole? I asks a favour.

SMOLLET

Oh yes, you'd like a favour now, wouldn't you? I told you many and many a time - you be kind to Mother Smollet and Mother Smollet will be kind to you. But was you kind? You was not.

RATSEY

Weren't personal. I was expecting a reprieve. I didn't see the need.

SMOLLET

Didn't see the need? Well when you stands there with the rope around your neck and no money for Jack Ketch - to grease the noose and pull hard on your legs so's you're turned off quick, when the cart moves out from under and you're thrashing and choking you remember Mother Smollet and maybe then you'll see the need.

RATSEY tenderly massages his throat. After a moment -

RATSEY

If you likes we can go to your room
this minute.

SMOLLET

Oh it's too late now.

SMOLLET turns away from RATSEY, leaving him in a brown study and oblivious to:

FIELDING

Resignation to God's will is the way
to his mercy. "Mercy?" You say, "For
me? A Highwayman? A Murderer?" Yes,
if you are resigned. And you should
be, as I will now prove. There is
happiness in suffering atonement is
there not? It follows then, that you,
with the gallows before you and the
possibility of roasting in hell
through all eternity, should be
happiest of all. Let us pray.

By now, SMOLLET has removed the ladder, covered the manhole and stowed his tools. FIELDING and RATSEY follow him down the passage. As they walk, RATSEY leans in to FIELDING.

RATSEY

Parson, you know the ten miles of
Dover Road between Gravesend and
Chatham? The right to work that
stretch belongs to me. I paid the
Brotherhood a hundred pounds for it.
It's yours for a pound to give Jack
Ketch. You can sell it at a handsome
profit.

FIELDING tuts and shakes his head.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Tell you what, then - you've heard of
the highwayman, Captain Baines?

FIELDING

Who has not?

RATSEY

If I tells you where he's hiding, will
you go to him and borrow a pound for
me? He's my mate, has been for years,
and there's never been a better. Like
brothers we are.

FIELDING

I'm afraid there's no time for that.

RATSEY

Well then suppose I sells you his
address for a pound and you turns him
in for the price on his head.

FIELDING takes out his watch.

FIELDING

We really must be getting on.

SMOLLET opens the door before them. RATSEY, after a futile attempt to tidy himself, squares his shoulders and swaggers to the threshold.

EXT. PRESS-YARD. DAY.

The press-yard is a high-walled enclosure with a great iron door at the end. Near it, a SHERIFF and a few armed BAILIFFS, all mounted, are waiting in wide double file. Near SMOLLET is a cart with horse and CARTER. It's a hot summer day. Tolling intermittently in the distance, some near, some far, are the bells of perhaps ten of London's 137 parish-churches, each with its distinctive tone. (Bells, in increasing numbers in later scenes, will never be silent until otherwise stated).

RATSEY can barely see in the sun. He cocks an ear.

RATSEY

What's that? A call to arms? Bloody
Dutch invading us?

SMOLLET

Passing-bells. All for you.

Gratified, RATSEY squints into the glare. SMOLLET pushes him towards the cart.

MAN'S VOICE

Pick up the step, mate. The worms is
hungry.

RATSEY looks up. Newgate's barred windows are jammed with the dirty faces of male and female PRISONERS. He waves a greeting and straightens his neckband.

WOMAN'S VOICE

Don't bother, dear. Ketch has a new
collar just your size.

RATSEY guffaws and blows her a kiss.

MAN'S VOICE

Ta-ta, cat's meat

Various calls now blend into a prolonged roaring interspersed with whistles and raspberries.

SMOLLET

Pardon me.

SMOLLET helps a WARDER slide a coffin onto the cart. As it passes under Ratsey's nose, his gaze grows thoughtful. At once a clear tenor knifes through the din.

PRISONER

It all comes out even
As you pays your debt Lilliburlero
bullen ala
Your mouth may be dry
But your britches is wet -

RATSEY

Whose mouth is dry, you bastard?

He spits on the coffin, shaking his fist at the PRISONERS, who are roaring the chorus of the song. SMOLLET is about to hand him into the cart but RATSEY vaults in nimbly and leaps on top of his own coffin, spitting vigorously right and left. He then executes a swift horn-pipe, hair tossing, a demon's grin splitting his face. The PRISONERS speed up their chorus, RATSEY dances like a man possessed. He concludes with a thunderous stomp and after a moment's hard-breathing silence is cheered to the skies by the PRISONERS. Chest heaving, RATSEY takes a deep bow and turns to face the exit. The SHERIFF makes a signal. RATSEY adjusts his hat, standing with one foot on his coffin and arm aloft in an heroic attitude. A guard opens the metal door and the cart, with its entourage, begins its exit into the street. RATSEY takes a deep breath.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

"Let British pluck match British -

EXT. STREETS LEADING TO TYBURN. DAY.

RATSEY'S speech dies in his throat. The streets are utterly deserted.

RATSEY

Where is everybody?

Bewildered, he turns back to see SMOLLET standing at the metal gate, laughing hysterically and waving a soiled hankie. RATSEY spits and turns back, his eyes darting about.

Here and there, we see houses with shuttered windows and lounging at the front doors, WATCHERS with halberds in their hands.

He turns to FIELDING, who is intoning scripture, but is forestalled by what he sees as they pass the graveyard of a small parish church. Mounds of a dozen new graves, DIGGERS at work in others, MOURNERS following a shoulder-borne coffin.

FIELDING pauses in his recitation.

FIELDING

The Plague is upon us. The Black
Plague.

EXT. TYBURN HILL. DAY.

The gallows sits on the crest of a hill in open country. A ladder goes from its cross-beam to the ground. The grizzled hangman (JACK KETCH) sits on the ground smoking a pipe. On the slope below him, fashioning a noose, is his morose assistant DAN. By DAN is an open-faced 'prentice, MORTIMER.

DAN

No more hanging's after this for fear
the crowds'll spread plague. Damn
him.

He spits.

MORTIMER

Not his fault.

DAN

How do I support my family if no-one
hangs? Does the Lord Mayor ask
hisself that?

KETCH

You want to think of it like this Dan.
They won't be sending nobody somewhere
else for hanging will they? No,
they'll just be accumulating, like
money in the bank. Think of it as
savings Dan.

MORTIMER

Here they come, Mr Ketch.

DAN tosses MORTIMER the rope.

KETCH

Up you goes young Mortimer.

The cart containing RATSEY and FIELDING is led up the hill by the SHERIFF and BAILIFFS. It stops directly beneath the cross-beam. The SHERIFF and BAILIFFS ride on a few feet before reining in and dismounting.

KETCH and DAN climb into the cart. RATSEY is looking very low.

KETCH (CONT'D)
Now, now, it won't be so bad.

RATSEY
(exploding)
A fine hanging! Not one bloody spectator! Bloody plague.

DAN fingers RATSEY's coat.

DAN
We won't get much for this.

KETCH
It's the custom at this moment in the proceedings to make me and my lads a small gift by way of saying thank you for whatever small courtesies we can render, if you knows what I mean.

RATSEY tends a watch.

RATSEY
Will this do?

KETCH
Oh a very handsome piece -

FIELDING snatches it.

FIELDING
That's mine. Really, how could you? At this awesome moment? Let me implore you again to make an open confession of your sins -

RATSEY spits. FIELDING sighs.

KETCH
Too bad, bucko. Ready up there, young Mortimer?

Dan ties RATSEY's hands behind him as MORTIMER lets down the noose. FIELDING reads from the Litany for the Dying. KETCH prepares to put the noose around RATSEY's neck.

KETCH (CONT'D)
Any last words?

RATSEY
(as if to a crowd)
Let British pluck match
British...(slumping) Oh get on with
it.

He spits one last time, but nothing much comes out. KETCH raises the noose, and suddenly MORTIMER slips down the ladder to the ground.

KETCH
You wants to be more careful young
Mortimer.

MORTIMER
Mr Ketch, I suddenly feels queer and
that's the truth.

MORTIMER sits heavily by the cartwheel, holding his head.

A thought occurs to Fielding, the same that has just occurred to KETCH and DAN.

FIELDING
It's not the plague? Boy, you don't
have the plague?

MORTIMER topples over on his side, moaning. With a shout, the SHERIFF and BAILIFFS fling themselves into their saddles and ride off a-ways.

DAN
Let's get on with it, quick.

KETCH raises the noose, but RATSEY jerks his head away.

RATSEY
I've changed my mind. I wants to
repent heartily of my sins.

KETCH
Not now you don't.

FIELDING
We cannot deny him repentance.

KETCH
It won't take long will it?

RATSEY
 (assuming an orator's pose)
 When I was three years old -

DAN
 Oh Christ.

RATSEY expounds at length on his childhood sins. As he does so:

KETCH
 Mr Fielding, I appeals to you.

FIELDING
 (to Ratsey)
 It's quality, not quantity, Captain
 Ratsey. Just one moment's true
 repentance and the Good Thief's case
 was accepted.

RATSEY is not to be stopped.

RATSEY
 My next crime was a few months later,
 when I was three-and-a-half. No, more
 like three-and-three-quarters. A
 playmate of mine, he had a spinning-
 top and I had none. Well-

DAN
 I don't care if I goes to hell for
 this.

DAN puts the noose around RATSEY's neck, tightens it, shoves
 FIELDING off the cart, and jumps off with KETCH.

KETCH
 Pull away, quick.

But the Carter, standing well away from the plague-infested
 cart, shakes his head stubbornly. DAN rushes to the driver's
 seat and snatches up the whip.

FIELDING
 (quickly)
 Depart, O Christian Soul, out of this
 world. In the name of -

DAN raises the whip. RATSEY closes his eyes.

HARRY V/O
 Hold on.

HARRY POYNTZ leaps off his coach before it stops and hurries up. A prospering tradesman and rising politician in his early thirties, he is self-made, self-confident and self-satisfied. As he nears MORTIMER, FIELDING makes a warning gesture.

FIELDING

That boy may be infected.

HARRY recoils, but gathers himself and addresses RATSEY.

HARRY V/O

Gamaliel Ratsey - I'm Harry Poyntz, Alderman of St. Barnabas Parish. I'm here to offer you the chance to escape hanging. Would you be willing to undertake the duty of corpse-bearer, risking death by plague in return for pardon?

RATSEY nods, the noose still tight around his neck.

HARRY

Are you certain you understand? Death by plague?

RATSEY nods.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Free him.

Taking a paper from his cuff, HARRY goes toward the SHERIFF. DAN overcomes his reluctance to be close to MORTIMER, and unties the dazed RATSEY.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Mr Lawrence directs you to place him in my custody. You acknowledge the Lord Mayor's signature?

The SHERIFF glances and, eager to be gone, turns his mount and gallops off with the BAILIFFS. RATSEY freed, DAN shoves him off the cart, kicks his hat after him and looks up at KETCH on the cross-beam picking at the knots in the rope. The CARTER nips into the driving-seat.

DAN

For God's sake, Mr Ketch, leave it. I'll buy you another rope.

FIELDING

What about the boy?

DAN

Damn the boy and let's be out of this.
He's poisoning the air.

HARRY, in the coach, puts his head out of the door impatiently.

HARRY

Come on then.

RATSEY heads to the coach. As he climbs in, his knees buckle, and HARRY catches his arm.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Too narrow a squeak for you was it?

HARRY grins and pushes RATSEY into a seat, making a grimace at his body odour.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(to his coachman)

Hurry it up, Ned, I'm wanted at home.

KETCH comes sliding down the ladder with the rope. DAN hauls him into the cart.

DAN

(to Fielding)

In, if you're coming.

FIELDING

You can't leave him.

DAN

Bloody well can and will.

The CARTER whacks his nag and the cart lurches off.

FIELDING

No. Wait for me.

FIELDING runs after the cart, stops short in indecision and runs back to MORTIMER. Again he runs to the cart and again returns. Then he sits, looking at MORTIMER and plucking the grass.

INT. COACH. DAY.

HARRY sits between PROTHERO, his clerk, who is reading, and BLANCHE, a white setter he loves. RATSEY is folded up in a corner, looking white. PROTHERO is a neat, sleek intelligent young man with a guarded but deferential manner.

HARRY
 (fondling Blanche)
 Oh God we'd like to be out in the
 fields with a gun today, wouldn't we?
 Rabbits, Blanche, rabbits.

BLANCHE barks.

HARRY (CONT'D)
 If you were human, what a fine wife
 you'd make, you sweet, loving, loving,
 loving gentle-mouthed bitch.

HARRY's last words have brought with them a train of melancholy thoughts. He turns from BLANCHE to stare at RATSEY with curiosity.

HARRY (CONT'D)
 How did it feel?

RATSEY
 What?

He's hoarse. HARRY pulls out a flask and throws it to him.

HARRY
 The knowledge that you were about to
 meet your Maker.

RATSEY stares at him, puzzled.

HARRY (CONT'D)
 Was there no revelation? No moment of
 truth or clarity?

Despite HARRY's habitually ironic tone, he's genuinely interested.

RATSEY
 No there bloody wasn't.

HARRY
 Just curious.

RATSEY
 Plague's bad then?

HARRY
 No, no. It's only in the suburbs.
 Not a trace within the City wall and
 none in our parish where you'll be
 quartered.

RATSEY

Doesn't bother me, mate.

PROTHERO

Escaping one form of death, "Captain", is no reason to suppose you'll escape another. Corpse-bearers don't last long.

RATSEY

Watch me.

He smiles his demon's grin, and settles back with the flask. PROTHERO is disconcerted. HARRY idly glances at PROTHERO's book, then reaches over and takes it, looking at the title with an indulgent smile.

HARRY

(reads)

William Lilly's Astrological Judgements for the year 1665.

PROTHERO reaches for the book but HARRY nudges his hand away.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(reading a page)

And in June, the Sun entering Cancer will have many terrible effects, among them the Plague. And a world of miserable people will perish therein.

(looking up)

Prothero, Prothero.

PROTHERO

The man predicted June, Mr Poyntz, and here is June and there's eighty dead of plague and seven parishes infected in less than one month.

HARRY

Any month he names will find plague somewhere in the world. It is nonsense to think it means London.

PROTHERO

Then what of that man seen running through the streets one night last week, crying "Woe to London, woe to London," naked but for his drawers?

HARRY

Perhaps the lady's husband came home unexpectedly.

RATSEY chortles.

PROTHERO

What?

HARRY whacks PROTHERO's thigh.

HARRY

Don't worry about it. London will stand with or without her drawers.

PROTHERO

Well, of course, I myself don't believe in any of this.

HARRY

Nor should you. What is more precious to me than my unborn child? If I thought it endangered by the plague would I sit here so calmly? Yet you see me.

RATSEY interrupts rudely.

RATSEY

If there ain't no plague in your parish, whose corpses'll I be bearing?

PROTHERO

His Worship, the Lord Mayor, is preparing for all eventualities. In the meantime, people die of other causes, you won't be idle.

RATSEY

Pity.

EXT. ST. BARNABAS GATE. DAY.

The coach approaches one of the gates in the massive City wall. Thin streams of vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow through it in both directions under the eye of a watchful CONSTABLE. The coach stops and he comes to the window.

CONSTABLE

Oh it's you Mr Poyntz. Who's this?

He indicates RATSEY.

HARRY

Never mind Constable, it's nothing to concern you. What's all this traffic?

CONSTABLE

You knows our orders Mr Poyntz. He ain't a vagrant? He ain't from an infected house?

HARRY

No no, I vouch for him.

The CONSTABLE nods and steps back as the coach moves on.

INT. COACH. DAY.

HARRY

(shouting out of the window)
Ned, get a move on.

PROTHERO

You're not worrying about tonight?

HARRY

No,no. I just want everything to be well-prepared.

PROTHERO

I'm sure His Lordship will be more than satisfied. He prefers simplicity to grandeur, I'm told.

HARRY's not sure he's too pleased with that remark, but he lets it pass.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)

You know, if the plague should reach the city we'll need additional constables to keep undesirables out of St. Barnabas.

HARRY

Sweet Christ. Preparation is all very well, but the expense...

PROTHERO

You could levy a special plague tax.

HARRY

And never be elected to office again. We must find a way to cut corners.

PROTHERO

Well, I've pencilled in John Hayward for one of the corpse-bearers...

HARRY
Hayward? Is that safe?

PROTHERO
He hasn't actually harmed anyone as yet. It won't be an easy position for us to fill, Mr Poyntz.

HARRY
I was about to send him to Bedlam.

PROTHERO
That would be another charge against the parish for his keep.

HARRY
Hayward for corpse-bearer it is.

Suddenly the coach stops with a spine-jarring crash.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

Entering the Alley from a cross-street, Harry's coach has locked front wheels with another turning into the Alley by the Church. The offending vehicle is ornately emblazoned and has a liveried COACHMAN, liveried Footman and a six-horse team.

COACHMAN
No bloody eyes in your bloody head you bloody abortion?

This gentle admonition has HARRY'S COACHMAN (NED) out of his seat to inspect the damage.

We are in a narrow, refuse-strewn way hemmed in on both sides by poky three-and-four-storey buildings. A few are tenements. The rest are shops with homes above, gardens and stables in the rear. Projecting on iron branches over most doors are vividly coloured shop signs to catch the eyes of illiterate customers. Harry's coach has reached St. Barnabas Church which has The Pye Tavern opposite. The Church has a clock-tower in which we may recognise the figures of Time and Death, ready to strike the hour.

The weekday bustle of haggling, street-cries, drovers with cows, an old clothes man (with a tower of hats on his head) a small coals man with his sack, tinkers, street musicians, and a Punch & Judy show makes the place more like a Hong-Kong market than anything else.

HARRY steps out, about to join Ned, but what he sees stops him in his tracks. Behind the ornate coach is a long line of similarly grand vehicles interspersed with baggage-wagons.

Mounted, armed RETAINERS guard the flanks. Devil-may-care CAVALIERS race up and down the line as though out on a spree. From the coach with which HARRY's has locked wheels springs a young nobleman (SIR FRANCIS) who beards his coachman with irritation.

SIR FRANCIS

Abel? How much longer, dammit?

COACHMAN

I'll have it right in a minute my Lord.

SIR FRANCES notices HARRY.

SIR FRANCIS

Why it's the tailor!

HARRY

Sir Frances.

Two COURT-LADIES poke their glittering heads out of the coach window.

SIR FRANCES

My dears, this is my tailor and the finest in England.

HARRY bows, controlling his irritation at being held up. The LADIES smile. The contrast between HARRY's sober attire and SIR FRANCIS's curls and ruffles could not be more marked. SIR FRANCES draws HARRY off apace.

SIR FRANCIS

I say, you're not here for the money I owe you are you?

HARRY

No, no Sir Frances, of course not. I live in Harrow Alley, and in actual fact -

SIR FRANCIS

Do you, Mr Poyntz, do you? Hurry up Abel, there's a good soul. (to Harry) Listen - haven't a penny with me now, never travel with cash, not with Captain Baines still abroad. Come and see me in Oxford though and we'll settle it there.

HARRY

Oxford, Sir Francis?

SIR FRANCIS

We're all going. The entire court.
No plague in Oxford you know. Come
and see me there.

HARRY

I'm remaining in the City, Sir
Francis.

SIR FRANCIS

Despite the plague?

HARRY

We really don't expect it to arrive in
the City. It's not severe.

SIR FRANCIS

Then you haven't seen this week's
Mortality Bill? No no, how could you?
Doesn't go on sale 'till tomorrow.

SIR FRANCIS takes a sheet of paper from his cuff and hands it to
HARRY. PROTHERO has materialised by his side.

SIR FRANCIS (CONT'D)

There. See? One hundred and ninety-
three dead of plague and five more out-
parishes infected. All in one week.
Frightful, eh? Keep that, do.

COACHMAN

Ready my Lord.

SIR FRANCIS

Good, Abel, good. (To Harry) No need
for such a long face. Turn your coach
about, come along to Oxford and you'll
be safe.

HARRY

I wasn't thinking of myself, Sir
Francis.

SIR FRANCIS

What then?

HARRY

It's just with all of you going off,
His Majesty will be left to carry the
entire burden alone.

SIR FRANCIS
 His Majesty, Mr Poyntz? His Majesty
 was the first to leave!

With that, SIR FRANCIS bounds into his coach and speeds down Harrow Alley and through Barnabas Gate to the open country beyond. The cavalcade follows, accompanied by laughter and song as though bound for the merriest of picnics.

HARRY, deeply disturbed, meets PROTHERO's gaze.

HARRY
 Well. I'm glad His Majesty had the
 good sense to leave.

PROTHERO
 His advisors probably had their hands
 full persuading him.

HARRY
 Yes. How he must have protested.

By the carriages, VENDORS offer up food for sale. A sturdy, good-looking WOMAN is selling loaves from a basket, running alongside to catch the coins. She bumps into HARRY and laughs.

BETTY
 Oh I am sorry Harry. Isn't it a merry
 sight?

HARRY looks distracted, as BETTY counts the coins in her hands.

HARRY
 Is the cake ready?

BETTY
 You asked me that this morning and
 it's still ready. What's this?

She holds up a coin for HARRY to see.

HARRY
 It's French coin Betty. They've
 dunned you.

BETTY
 - Oh you Rogue -

She takes off after a coach, shouting. HARRY looks after her, then opens the door of his own coach, which now cannot get by for the Court traffic.

HARRY

Look at this traffic. It's impossible, we'll walk, it'll be quicker. Ned - meet me round the back alley, I'll need to go on to the Lord Mayor's after I've been home. (to RATSEY) Come on you - out. Come Blanche.

BLANCHE and RATSEY emerge. As they walk off.

RATSEY

Did I hear you say you was a tailor?

HARRY

You did. I am.

RATSEY

Any chance of doing something with this for me?

He holds out a portion of his threadbare coat. HARRY doesn't respond, but urgently shoulders his way into the Alley.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

Continuous shot. Near the entrance to the Pye Tavern is a recessed angle in the wall. Standing in it is SOLOMON EAGLE, a gaunt elderly man, eyes fixed on the ground, preaching in a steady monotone, seemingly not caring whether anyone pays attention or not. No-one ever has. HARRY'S group approaches the Pye as MAG FEENY, the harassed and slatternly wife of the Proprietor, exits to empty a bucket of slops into the open drain.

HARRY

Would your husband be about Mrs Feeny?
I have another boarder for him.

MRS FEENY

Oh no. Out before dawn he was,
scavenging for food to feed the extra
mouths we already has -

RATSEY examines the slops for anything edible. He finds some potato peelings and pushes them into his mouth. PROTHERO watches him, disgusted. Suddenly a roar comes from the open upstairs window. JACK FEENY, all unshaven jowl and bluster, appears at the window with a chipped potty.

JACK FEENY

Who's pissed on the sodding accounts?

He fishes a soggy booklet from the potty.

HARRY

Mr Feeny! I need a word -

Seeing HARRY, FEENY's face darkens. He shakes the accounts book out and everyone avoids the drops.

FEENY

What more can you want with me
Alderman? You see how I is beset.

HARRY

This is Ratsey.

RATSEY

Captain Montessor if you please.

HARRY

Ratsey. He's for corpse-bearer.
You're to provide bed and board.

FEENY

Not another. In heaven's name Mr
Poyntz -

HARRY

The more you take in, the faster your
debt to the Parish will be cleared Mr
Feeny.

FEENY

Have a heart Alderman - consider -
we've the weird sisters, we've the
black devil Toby, Mr Prothero has just
sent us mad John Hayward what we
expects him to murder us in our bed
every moment, another will break me
for certain.

HARRY

You should've thought of that while
you were drinking your tax-money Mr
Feeny. Mrs Feeny. May I present Mr
Ratsey. Show him to his quarters.

HARRY pushes RATSEY forward. He makes an elaborate bow with his
broken hat to the scowling MRS FEENY.

HARRY (CONT'D)

(to Ratsey)

You're back from the brink -
try and keep it that way.

RATSEY

I will, Mr Alderman Poyntz Sir.

He grins and follows MRS FEENY off, as HARRY and PROTHERO resume their course. FEENY stares after them with hatred.

FEENY

Blood from a stone he wants.

FEENY spits.

FEENY (CONT'D)

Mags, send Toby for Beck. Hodges must've had enough of her by now, we needs an extra pair of hands.

INT. DR HODGES'S BEDROOM. DAY.

BECK shuts the door to the ante-room and turns to DR NATHANIEL HODGES, who is sitting cross-legged on the bed. She is eighteen with a pretty, sulky face and a figure that makes men gasp. HODGES, almost seventy, is a corpulent giant, cynical, irreverent, humane and misanthropic; he has absolutely no illusions. Each wears only a blanket.

BECK

Says he's a patient of yours name of Spicer. Should I tell him to wait? Or do you want to try again?

HODGES

What's the use, Beck?

BECK

Maybe a drink would help.

HODGES

A drink would kill me. No, I'm done with that and it seems I've done with you too.

BECK

Maybe tomorrow will be better.

HODGES

Tomorrow I'll be even older.

BECK shrugs. A pebble rattles the window-pane. She looks out. Her P.O.V. of the street below where stands a gentle, sad Jamaican named TOBY.

TOBY

Your ma wants you immediate if you're done.

Beck nods and turns back to DR HODGES.

BECK

I have to go. Lots of the gentry seem to be travelling.

She starts to dress. HODGES gestures towards some coins on a table.

BECK (CONT'D)

Oh that's all right. Ain't as though something happened.

HODGES

Take some take some Beck.

BECK

How much?

HODGES

As much as you like.

BECK

The usual, then.

HODGES, holding the blanket about him, goes into the ante-room as BECK resumes dressing.

INT. HODGES'S ANTE-ROOM. DAY.

SPICER, a slack-jawed mechanic, gets up as HODGES enters and holds out to him a beaker half-filled with liquid. HODGES takes it and goes to the window. He holds it up to the light, squints at it, dips his finger in and tastes it.

HODGES

I wish I had your kidneys Spicer.

BECK enters, dressed from the bedroom and goes toward the door to the staircase.

HODGES (CONT'D)

(to Beck)

Deliver a message to Mr Poyntz for me, like a good girl?

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

HARRY's hurrying down the Alley, clutching the Mortality Bill. He's accosted outside a shop by SAM KILLIGREW, the bluff, shrewd proprietor. Sitting by Sam upon a gigantic and odoriferous cheese is Sam's tense six-year-old son, Dickie. In the crowded shop behind them, Sal Killigrew, his good-humoured, plump wife, is unloading a barrow groceries.

SAM
Harry! A word -

HARRY
What is it Sam? I'm in a rush -

Sam indicates Dickie's cheesy throne.

SAM
I think the cheese is too big.
I got carried away, what with it being
for the Lord Mayor and all -
and the fact is, Harry, I don't know
what to charge you for it -

HARRY
It doesn't matter Sam -

SAM
Is that the Mortality Bill?

SAM takes the Bill and peruses it while HARRY examines the cheese.

HARRY
It is quite large, isn't it Dickie?

DICKIE
(thrilled)
'Normous!

SAM
St. Brides's parish now too. I'm glad
I changed my mind about opening
another shop there. Trade will be
fallen to nothing. And St. James's
... I tell you Harry boy, death's
coming too close for comfort.

DICKIE's face puckers. He lets out a wail. HARRY looks at him with concern.

SAM (CONT'D)
What is it Dickie? Tell me, son.

DICKIE

Humphrey says when I die they'll put me in a hole in the ground and the worms'll eat me.

SAM

Now now now, would your Da-da let that happen to you? Would I? I'd keep out those worms by shutting you up in a nice strong wooden box, like that one.

He points out a grocery box by the shop entrance. HARRY gives SAM a warning look but SAM ignores him.

SAM (CONT'D)

Then I'd put you in the hole, see.

DICKIE stares at the box and lets out an even bigger wail.

HARRY

Oh, for God's sake Sam, give him to me. Nice strong wooden box.

HARRY takes DICKIE in his arms.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Now you listen to your Uncle Poyntz.

DICKIE

You're not my uncle.

HARRY

True enough, but we've known each other a long time haven't we? Didn't you dandle me on your knee when I was a baby?

DICKIE

(delighted)

You dandled me on your knee.

HARRY

Oh was that the way of it? Anyway, no one's going to shut you in a box, and no-one's going to put you in a hole, and if you ever die which I very much doubt, you'll fly straight to Heaven to drink tea with Jesus and furthermore if you see any worms you're to catch them and we'll go fishing, you and me and Blanche. Agreed?

DICKIE nods with vigour, and hiccups. HARRY reaches for the Mortality Bill but SAM has moved away.

SAM

Sal. He's got the hiccups again.
It's not natural. Do something.

SAL

'Course it's natural.

SAM

Can't you give him something?

SAL

Sam. You'd think he was the first child we'd ever raised.

SAM

He's the first male. They need special attention.

BECK approaches, smiling provocatively at HARRY, who manages to grab the Bill from SAM.

BECK

Mr Poyntz, sir. Dr Hodges sends you a message. He says he will not be at your celebration this evening, much as he regrets.

HARRY

Oh? Did something come up?

BECK

(after a giggle)
No, sir. His spirits is low, he says.

HARRY

Thank you.

BECK walks on. The two men watch her progress.

SAM

(sotto voice)
Ever cross your mind you'd like to -

HARRY

Oh no, no, no. No.

SAM

How many no's was that?

HARRY

I'm off, Sam. I'm on my way to see his Lordship.

SAM

But he'll be at your house tonight won't he? Eating my cheese.

HARRY

I'm hardly going to bring up the plague tonight am I?

SAM

Probably not. Not really party-talk is it? (indicating Bill). That's bad news, so it is. It's not so much for me, I'm concerned, it's the little ones. I'm told that just from the mother's having seen a plague victim, a child died in her womb -

He looks at HARRY's stricken face and a thought strikes him.

SAM (CONT'D)

Lord, Harry, forgive me. Take no notice of that, it's an old woman's tale, of course it is.

HARRY starts away.

HARRY

Come Blanche.

SAL

Harry, send Nan home will you?

HARRY waves, and quickens his pace down the alley.

EXT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

HARRY's shop has a sign for Tailoring. It is number 6 and has this numeral painted above the door. He enters at speed, BLANCHE gambolling at his heels.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

HARRY's elderly journeyman-tailor OKESHOTT, is fitting a Patron before a mirror. WILL and HARVEY, the apprentices, sit cross-legged on the work-table, sewing.

HARRY

Will, see where Ned is. Round the back somewhere - I'll be leaving at once.

HARRY nods to the Patron and dashes up the stairs.

INT. PARLOUR. HARRY & JEM'S HOME. DAY.

JEMIMAH (JEM) POYNTZ, a beautiful girl six months pregnant, sits playing the spinet and singing with NAN KILLIGREW, who is of the same age and lively with it. They break off as Harry enters with Blanche, NAN with a welcoming smile and JEM sobering instantly, all the vivacity fading.

NAN

Did you hear us Uncle Harry? Wasn't it atrocious? Like two cats on a wall.

HARRY

Your Mother wants you, Nan.

NAN kisses JEM and gathers her shawl.

NAN

Wait till you see me tonight, Uncle Harry. Mother says I may wear beauty patches here and here, like a lady of the court.

NAN pecks HARRY's cheek and trots out, leaving the POYNTZES alone with their silence.

HARRY

Mrs. Poyntz I've come to check the arrangements for this evening - how is the child? Does it stir?

JEM

Not for a while.

HARRY

Not for a while? Then let me send for Dr. Hodges.

JEM

The child is sleeping I think. It kicked this morning hard enough, and all night too.

HARRY

It is well then?

JEM

Yes.

HARRY nods. The gulf between them yawns.

HARRY

Everything's ready then?

JEM

Mr Poyntz -

HARRY

Yes?

JEM

I am well too ...

The resentment in her voice is designed to provoke.

HARRY

I see that well enough with my own eyes since you have time to loiter about with your friends before the most important feast-day this house has ever seen.

JEM

I have prepared all - I decanted the wine myself, I saw the silver was polished, I told Gosnell how I wanted the chickens roasting and the carp stewing -

HARRY

Gosnell?

JEM

Yes of course. Gosnell. Our cook.

HARRY tries very hard not to explode.

HARRY

I told you. I asked you to hire another cook for this evening. The Lord Mayor himself is coming to our house -

JEM

I know - but I -

HARRY

Gosnell is a terrible cook -

JEM

She is not. She is clean and reliable.

HARRY

I don't need clean and reliable. I need delicious food for my immediate superior, Sir John Lawrence - how in God's name d'you expect me to impress the man if he's choking on Gosnell's gullet-throttling slops?

JEM

I couldn't find anyone else -

HARRY

Then why didn't you tell me?

JEM

You weren't here. Leave Gosnell alone. You're so rough with her. It's only because I chose her -

HARRY

It is not because you chose her, it is because she is inefficient and gormless.

JEM

She is not gormless.

HARRY

Added to which she is the worst cook in London - Great God, all eyes are upon us, Mrs Poyntz, we'll be the laughing-stock - I'll ask Sal to help -

JEM

Don't interfere!

She rises, full of emotion. Harry watches, alarmed.

HARRY

Enough. Sit down for God's sake, don't upset yourself.

JEM

Myself? Or the baby?

WILL appears timidly above the rim of the top step.

WILL

Excuse me Mr Poyntz, your coach is at
Pye corner. Ned says he can't get
nearer the house for the traffic.

WILL disappears fast. JEM has subsided into still sadness.
HARRY breathes in, and thunders off downstairs. JEM starts to
cry, thinks better of it and breaks a cup instead.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

HARRY hurries toward Pye Corner with BLANCHE. He passes SOLOMON
EAGLE and sees that one or two people have stopped to listen.
He reaches the coach, and stares at the sight a moment longer
before turning to face NED.

HARRY

Do you know, Ned, in twenty years or
more that is the first time I've known
anyone pay the slightest attention to
Solomon Eagle.

HARRY climbs into the coach.

HARRY (CONT'D)

To the Lord Mayor's if you please.

He settles back into the seat, putting his arm around Blanche.
After a moment, he leans his head against her warm fur.

INT. PYE TAVERN. DAY.

The Pye is a dim, low-ceilinged affair, none too clean, with a
staircase leading to the upper floors where there are rooms for
guests. BECK has brought a pitcher of beer and mugs for FEENY
and PROTHERO who sit at one of the tables. She has also brought
a much smaller mug and a heel of stale bread for RATSEY, who
sits with them. RATSEY shuts his eyes and sniffs at her.

RATSEY

Oh God. Two months since I smelled a
female.

RATSEY tosses off his beer and attacks the bread. FEENY watches
him, eyes narrowed.

FEENY

And how long does I board this
bottomless pit?

PROTHERO

It's all being credited to what you
owe, Mr Feeny.

(MORE)

PROTHERO (cont'd)
 If the plague lifts tomorrow, back to
 Newgate for hanging he goes. If it
 strikes our parish and grows hot, then
 he stays as long as he survives.
 Which won't be very long.

RATSEY guffaws and reaches for the pitcher. FEENY snatches it
 out of reach.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
 That's a most peculiar, superior
 attitude toward the plague you have
 friend, and I'm wondering why.

RATSEY chews his hard bread, taps the side of his nose.

RATSEY
 (lowering his voice
 dramatically)
 I'll tell you why. I once met a Gypsy
 in the woods. Gypsies, they knows
 things we don't. He'd been poaching,
 see, and he was caught in a trap.
 When I frees him, he says "I've no
 money to give you, but I'll show you
 how my people protects themselves from
 plague. There's a certain plant,"
 says he. (Yawning) Where does I
 sleep?

FEENY
 Wait. What plant?

RATSEY
 Well - all right to have some -?

He gestures at the pitcher. FEENY eagerly refills his mug.
 RATSEY knocks it back, lowers his voice again.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
 He takes me to the Gypsies' graveyard.
 It's midnight and there's a full moon.
 He heaves up a great rock and I seen a
 trap-door. Down we goes -

RATSEY refills his mug, indicating his dry throat.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
 We're in a cave, see? He lights a
 candle and what do I see before me?

A dark-skinned hand has crept up from under the table toward the
 remains of RATSEY's bread.

RATSEY seizes it and drags up the terrified TOBY. Twisting his arm, RATSEY sends TOBY spinning across the room.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
Can't stand their colour I can't. And they stinks.

PROTHERO
So do you.

RATSEY
Ah, but mine's a white stink. There's a difference, see how I mean?

PROTHERO
No.

FEENY
What did you see?

Puzzled, RATSEY turns to FEENY as BECK comes to clear.

FEENY (CONT'D)
The story, man, the story. What happened then?

RATSEY
Oh. Oh - well I went for a shag with the duchess right there on the poop-deck. Captain's parrot shat on me britches.

RATSEY roars with laughter, and reaching for the pitcher, looks up at BECK.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
And what might your name be darling?

FEENY snatches the pitcher and stomps off. RATSEY squeezes BECK's bottom but she evades him. RATSEY turns to two women at a nearby table: MRS TOLLIVER, a bleary drunkard of sixty, and MRS POVEY, a feeble-minded creature of fifty. They are dressed in black and each carries a white staff of office. Ratsey inspects MRS TOLLIVER, rejects her and turns to MRS POVEY.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
And who might you be darling?

MRS POVEY
I'm Povey. I'm searcher of the dead. I am. When they dies, I searches them. Her too.

Both women thump their staffs of office importantly.

RATSEY

Are you now? Come to the stable dear -
I ain't dead but you can search me
anyhows -

Giggling and clamping MRS POVEY's wrist, RATSEY pulls her to her feet.

PROTHERO

If it's a Gypsy charm you're depending
on for protection from the plague,
friend, I pity you.

RATSEY

(snaps his fingers)

That was the yarn I was spinning. I
couldn't remember. Stick the pity,
friend, where it'll do most good.
You'll need it more than me if the
plague comes close.

PROTHERO

What makes you so certain, friend?

RATSEY brings his face very close to PROTHERO's.

RATSEY

Because I once had the plague, friend,
and you don't ... get it ... twice.

RATSEY points at PROTHERO's stricken expression, shouts with triumph, and whirls MRS. POVEY out the rear-door.

PROTHERO

(perhaps to God)

But that's not just.

EXT. LORD MAYOR'S HOUSE. DAY.

MINGS, an efficient head clerk, is on the doorstep issuing instructions to mounted couriers. There are a lot of people outside the building, some with the new Mortality Bill, all trying to ask questions of the busy couriers. Word of the death toll has clearly started to get out.

HARRY bounds up the steps with BLANCHE.

MINGS

Mr Poyntz. I was about to send for
you. His Worship is in the office.

INT. LORD MAYORS OFFICE. DAY.

In the spacious, sunny, austere room, JOHN LAWRENCE, Lord Mayor of London, is dictating to his clerk (TEDDIMAN). LAWRENCE is sixty, with a wrestlers build and stubborn chin. The atmosphere is urgently busy.

LAWRENCE

Our principal task is to prevent the infection from entering the City - therefore, I order all assemblies prohibited, except for worship. I want the schools closed, theatres closed -

HARRY enters with BLANCHE.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Ah Harry. Good.

HARRY

I've seen tomorrow's Mortality Bill John. A hundred and ninety-three dead of the plague.

(fishing)

The situation's very bad, isn't it?

LAWRENCE

A hundred and ninety three would make it sad enough but not too bad.

HARRY

(brightening)

There's no cause for alarm, then.

LAWRENCE

Not if it were only a hundred and ninety-three. But the true figure, I'd say, is nearer four hundred.

HARRY can only stare.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Harry, you know the Bills never show more than seventy dead from all causes in any one week. Tomorrow's shows five hundred. One hundred and ninety-three from plague - the rest laid to - what?

He picks up the Bill from his desk and slaps it with his hand.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Old Age, Consumption, Pox, everything but. There's a great temptation to lie when someone in your family dies of plague and you face forty days quarantine in an infected house.

HARRY

Four hundred. In one week.

LAWRENCE

It's an ugly truth and we face many. A lot of the high-ups who left with the court turned out their servants - without a penny - for us to take care of. Christ I hate those powdered popinjays. The King, god rot him -

HARRY

John, for God's sake -

HARRY gestures in alarm to the clerks to-ing and fro-ing.

LAWRENCE

The King, God, as I said, rot him, is spending all our civic funds on the war with Holland - oh and the farmers are threatening to stop delivering goods to the markets for fear of infection. Oh 'tis a merry dance we're starting Harry, make no mistake about it.

HARRY slumps in dejection.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Still, it's not as if there's nothing to be done.

HARRY

(recovering)

Of course. What provision did His Majesty make before he left?

LAWRENCE

His Majesty? His Majesty graciously granted me a two-minute audience as he stood with a foot in the coach, ready to depart. It might have been longer, but his spaniel began choking on a chicken-bone and that being a truly serious matter, the audience ended.

(sees Harry's despair)

(MORE)

LAWRENCE (cont'd)

Never mind, Harry. When I said there's something to be done, I meant we will do it. Dr. Alston has assured me the College of Physicians will soon devise effective preventative measures, and from now on no-one will be allowed to leave the City without a health certificate signed by his Parish Alderman. That'll soothe the farmers. All's not lost.

HARRY

It's not myself I'm concerned for John, but I have a child soon due.

LAWRENCE

And I have five already here.

HARRY

John - I've waited so long - I've wanted a child for - well. John, I've been happy to serve as alderman, but - this child will be very dear to me, and -

LAWRENCE

(forestalling)

Of course it will be dear to you. And that's why you'll want your child to be proud of you when it's old enough to understand. You'll want it to know you stayed and did your duty in a crisis.

HARRY

What I have in mind, John -

LAWRENCE

No, Harry. What panic you'd feel if the sun failed to appear one day, or the moon. Well, we are the planets to Londoners, we are the surety that order will be preserved and suffering alleviated. Many will surely leave but those left behind will be the ones who need us most - the poor, and tradespeople who can't leave their businesses - we can't turn our backs on them, Harry. I will ride through the streets every day to let myself be seen and I expect every alderman to discharge the trust reposed in him to the utmost.

(MORE)

LAWRENCE (cont'd)

I'll break any man who tries to wriggle out of it, I'll fine him, I'll blacken his name, I'll see to it he never again holds office. This City will be maintained.

HARRY

I'll send the child - I mean, my wife, to her parents in Dover.

LAWRENCE

It won't do, Harry. How can we assure people of this City that they are safe when aldermen are sending away their families?

HARRY

My god, what sins have we committed to deserve all this.

LAWRENCE

Great ones, surely. I'm proclaiming tomorrow and every Wednesday a day of public confession. We will all attend church and implore his Mercy by opening our hearts.

MRS LAWRENCE comes in with the gold chain of office and places it about her husband's neck.

MRS LAWRENCE

The aldermen are gathering, Jack.

LAWRENCE

Thank you, wife. You needn't stay for the meeting Harry, you've heard it all. Teddiman will bring you a copy of the plague orders as soon as they're drawn.

TEDDIMAN

It won't be before morning, Mr Poyntz.

LAWRENCE

Read them in church after the service so that all may know.

LAWRENCE starts to leave and then turns back.

LAWRENCE (CONT'D)

Oh Harry - I'll not be able to come to your feast, there's too much afoot. Forgive me. And good luck.

HARRY nods and walks away.

EXT. HARRY'S GARDEN. NIGHT.

A table has been set out under a tree. The feast is over, and GOSNELL is removing the still-rather-full dishes. She is inefficient and gormless and HARRY, clearly, was not exaggerating the sorry level of her culinary expertise. Left on a separate table is a huge celebration cake. Sitting on chairs and on the grass are the women, JEM, BETTY BUCKWORTH, SAL and NAN KILLIGREW. DICKIE is still sitting on the cheese which appears larger still for having been partially eaten. At the other end of the garden the men are standing talking: HARRY, the vicar CECIL CHANDLER, JASPER BUCKWORTH the Baker, SAM KILLIGREW and PROTHERO. Between HARRY'S building and the next, the drift of coaches and wagons toward Barnabas Gate is visible. We join the women first - SAL and NAN are playing a game. JEM casts a rueful glance at the half-full plates.

JEM

Well at least your cake will be good,
Bet.

BETTY

Ach, don't fret. Chickens are all
tough these days. Farmers are getting
soft, letting them live too long ...

JEM

I should've asked for help.

She glances over to HARRY, her body stiff with unspoken anxieties. BETTY watches her kindly.

BETTY

How's the family?

JEM

Ma and Pa are looking to move closer
than Dover now the baby's coming.

BETTY

That's good. But I mean your family.

JEM

Oh I am well. The baby's kicking me
to pieces.

BETTY

And Harry?

JEM

Oh.

We join the men on the other side of the garden. SAM has been cocking an ear to the bells.

SAM

Brickbats and tiles say the bells of St. Giles. That's the second death bell for St. Giles in less than five minutes.

JASPER

Shhh. Listen. Oranges and lemons say the bells of St. Clement's. God rest whoever it be.

CHANDLER

Amen.

HARRY

I hear one of the aldermen is thinking of going away.

SAM

I'd tell him what for if I could. I'm staying and I'm just a grocer.

HARRY

Are you, Sam?

SAM

Course. I can't leave my stores can I? Got enough to feed an army for a year. How would I carry it?

JASPER

I wish Betty and I could go away.

PROTHERO

What's stopping you?

JASPER

Folks need bread don't they. Who'd bake it?

PROTHERO

That alderman must be truly contemptible.

On the other side of the garden, JEM and BETTY continue their conversation.

BETTY

Don't be too hard on Harry, Jem. I know he's busy but he wants to do well - for you and the child -

JEM

For himself. He wants to do well for himself.

BETTY

Well it's all one isn't it? You and he are one, a man and wife should be united.

JEM

Not everyone's as lucky as you and Jasper. You can work together in the Bakery. Harry's got Will and Harvey to do his sewing, and he's out directing parish-affairs the rest of the time -

BETTY

But with you at heart, Jem.

JEM

I am nothing. Nothing but a vessel for his heirs.

BETTY's rather shocked.

BETTY

You're too sharp for your years Jemimah.

JEM

What should I be? Soft? Silent? Is that what's wanted?

Her voice rises. SAL and NAN look up from their game as BETTY soothes her. HARRY looks over from his group, his brow furrowing. JASPER tries to lighten the mood.

JASPER

Time to cut that cake, don't you think Harry?

The men start to walk off. HARRY holds SAM back.

HARRY

Sam if it comes to the parish, I'll be in the thick of it. My house will not be safe.

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)

May Jem stay with you, if need be, and the child? Till the infection's gone?

SAM

Of course, Harry, of course. And Sal's a good midwife too if it comes to that. Don't you worry.

They walk back arm-in-arm. Everyone is standing around the cake.

HARRY

Dickie, your father says you never touch cake, and your mother swears you don't care for it, but if I asked you specially, would you be willing to try it for us first, just for politeness?

DICKIE nods vigorously.

DICKIE

Which bit should I take?

HARRY

Why, the top bit of course.

DICKIE gets off the cheese and comes forward, eyes glittering. He stands on tip-toe, and reaches up to the creamy top. Suddenly, he loses his balance and topples toward the cake, going in up to his armpits. There is a moment's silence.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Or the bit in the middle.

NAN and JEM start to laugh.

DICKIE

Oh Uncle Poyntz.

DICKIE is stiff with shock.

DICKIE (CONT'D)

Are you cross?

HARRY can't speak, being doubled up with mirth. DICKIE pulls his arms out of the cake which collapses. BLANCHE attacks him, licking him wildly. DICKIE starts to cry. JEM makes a decision. She goes firmly up to the cake, sticks her arm in up to the elbow, takes it out and starts to lick it. DICKIE laughs. He throws some cake at NAN. CHANDLER gets a goblet on his face. He licks it off.

CHANDLER

Oh that is good.

BETTY
Not too sweet?

All tension dispelled, the guests join the old-fashioned food fight. A large lump hits HARRY and slides elegantly down his cheek. JEM gives an involuntary shout of laughter. As he looks over to her, she quells it down to a smile that he cannot help but return. Suddenly CHANDLER holds up his arms and shouts.

CHANDLER
Quiet, everyone! Quiet!

They all stop and look at him expectantly, thinking a game is underway.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
(his face ashen)
Two sticks and an apple. Say the bells of Whitechapel. The plague is within the wall.

Everyone is still as a statue.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)
I must prepare tomorrow's sermon.

Like a sleep-walker, he makes his way slowly to the garden door, and out. Each family draws together.

SAM
We'd all best go home.

INT. HARRY'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

JEM is washing the cake off her arms in her shift. HARRY watches. She gets into bed. He stares at her with longing. He reaches a hand towards her. She stiffens. He lets out a gasp of breath.

HARRY
Christ. Not since our wedding night.

JEM lies still, hardly breathing.

JEM
You can if you like.

HARRY beats the bed one savage blow.

HARRY
I know I can if I like. Thank you for nothing. If there's no joy in it for you, there's none for me.

He snuffs the candle.

INT. ST. BARNABAS CHURCH. DAY.

The place is heaving. Many must stand in the rear and against the side walls. We see the KILLIGREWS, BUCKWORTHS, FEENYS, PROTHERO, HARRY & JEM at the front. CHANDLER is in the midst of his sermon.

CHANDLER

...This minute I was well and the next I am ill. We polish every stone with which we build that building, Health, but in a minute a Cannon demolishes all...

TEDDIMAN enters at the back, looks for HARRY, makes his way through the press, hands HARRY the plague orders and leaves, CHANDLER preaching and watching all the while.

CHANDLER (CONT'D)

... Behold us, O God, here gathered together in confidence of Thy promise that when two or three are gathered together in Thy name, Thou wilt be in their petitions. We confess that we are not worthy. Vanities have covered us. Licentiousness hath inflamed us. Voluptuousness hath fed us. But with as many of us as begin their newness of life this minute, O God, begin Thou Thy account with them and put all that is past out of Thy remembrance... We will pray now silently, and let those who wish to confess, rise and do so.

Everyone bows his head. After a moment, little DICKIE KILLIGREW gets to his feet.

DICKIE

I took an apple from the barrel and brought it to bed with me and ate it in the dark when I was told not to.

He sits and then rises on an afterthought.

DICKIE (CONT'D)

I won't do it again.

He sits. CHANDLER waits but no-one else rises. Perhaps the peril is not yet close enough.

CHANDLER
Alderman Poyntz?

CHANDLER leaves the pulpit as HARRY turns to face the assembly, unrolling the plague orders.

HARRY
(reads)
Orders concerning the Infection.
First it is ordered that every
householder keep the street before his
house clean and swept. That the
sweepings and filth of the houses be
daily carried away by the rakers.
That no hogs, cats or tame pigeons be
kept within the City and that all dogs
.... be killed by dog-killers
appointed for that purpose ...

HARRY's voice trails off. His eyes meet JEM's. He recovers.

HARRY (CONT'D)
That special care be taken that no
rotten fish, unwholesome flesh -

EXT. ST. BARNABAS CHURCH. DAY.

HARRY stands dazed with JEM as the PARISHIONERS flow out past them. Emerging, PROTHERO pauses next to HARRY who hands him the plague orders with a few muttered words and dully watches as PROTHERO scans the crowd, sees the man he's looking for, and raises a hand.

PROTHERO
(calling)
Hayward. John Hayward. Over here.

JOHN HAYWARD, lounging in the doorway of the Pye, is a hulking brute with a set twisted smile and mad eyes. At PROTHERO's summons he crosses the traffic in the Alley. People give him a wide berth.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
You're to kill every dog in the
parish. Do you understand? They
carry the infection in their hair.
Kill them all. If anyone tries to
prevent you, report them to me.

HAYWARD is thrilled. Stooping, he rips up a loose cobble and looks about for game. A mongrel is gnawing offal nearby. HAYWARD lopes toward it. It scurries behind a barrel.

There, HAYWARD catches it. HARRY shudders at the sounds. JEM pulls him off towards home.

Across the Alley, two strangers travel in the opposite direction to most of the traffic which is making its way out of the Gate. They stop at the house next to the Pye. MERLIN is a tall emaciated black-cloaked figure with an eye-patch. AZAZEL, his assistant, is a fat little man with a greasy smile. He addresses BECK in the Pye's doorway.

AZAZEL

Is this the Robinson house?

BECK

Yes, but they left the City this morning.

AZAZEL

I know. They've rented it to us.

AZAZEL opens the front door with a key, lets MERLIN in, and starts to beat a small drum. Curious SPECTATORS gather.

AZAZEL (CONT'D)

Merlin is here, Merlin the wise and all-knowing, Merlin the great. He knows the past, the present and the future and has been praised by all the crowned heads in the world. He has infallible preventive pills against the plague, sovereign cordials against the consumption of the air, and a full line of charms and amulets against all ills. And friends, he directs the poor GRATIS, absolutely free of charge. Merlin, Merlin is here.

BECK

You say it's free?

AZAZEL

I said it's free and it is free.

(lower)

His advice, that is. For everything else, there is a small fee.

BECK

Will the sickness come to this parish, can you tell me?

AZAZEL

The planets have revealed to Merlin, I regret to say, that it will - and many of you, I will not mention the names, no, no, don't press me, many of you will die. Unless, that is, you avail yourself of Merlin's help.

With a final rat-tat of his drum, AZAZEL enters the house and shuts the door.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

BLANCHE bounds up to HARRY and JEM as they enter. She darts away again and HARRY opens a drawer and takes out a knife. BLANCHE comes to HARRY and lays a slipper at his feet and begs. HARRY picks it up and flings it into the garden. BLANCHE rushes after it, yapping with joy.

JEM

No. You can't. Not you. Let Prothero. Or Will. Or Harvey.

HARRY

They might hurt her.

He goes into the garden. JEM'S eyes follow him until, abruptly, she turns away. After a while, HARRY comes back in panting, tears running down his cheeks. He throws the bloodied knife into a corner and snatches up a sack. He goes back into the garden. Sobbing now, JEM picks up the knife to wash it. HARRY comes back with the sack containing BLANCHE'S body, and white-faced, passes wordless into the street.

INT. PYE TAVERN. DAY.

Trade is brisk. The inhabitants of Harrow Alley have much to discuss and it's better over a tankard of beer. RATSEY enters from the rear-door with MRS POVEY in tow. They're covered with bits of straw. RATSEY goes to FEENY who's jawing with his patrons.

RATSEY

I'm hungry.

FEENY ignores him.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

I says I'm hungry.

No response. After a beat, RATSEY lets out a howl that silences the room, doubles up and clutches his thigh.

FEENY

For the love of God, what was that?

RATSEY

Sorry mates. Happens every now and then. Ever since I was little and had the plague. It's easing off a bit now.

FEENY

Had the plague.

He snorts.

RATSEY

Plague's what I said and plague's what I had. Look here. See?

RATSEY shows FEENY a deep, criss-cross scar behind his ear.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

That's where the swelling was before they cut it and let out the pus. Some gets it there, some under the arm, some in the crotch. Some in all three.

FEENY

My God.

RATSEY

See that?

RATSEY shows off his scar.

PATRON

And you still suffer after all these years.

RATSEY

You knows how it is with rheumatics when the weather changes? They gets a twinge? It's that way with me when I'm in a room where someone has the plague.

It takes a moment for this to sink in. Then, with terrified shouts, a dropping of mugs and overturning of benches, the room is emptied. RATSEY starts to help himself to the abandoned dinners, and, noticing HAYWARD in a corner studying what appear to be small, hairy whips, goes over to him. HAYWARD holds them out for inspection.

HAYWARD

A tail for every dog I killed.

RATSEY

No fear of plague mate?

HAYWARD

I had it too, and lived.

RATSEY

G'arn.

HAYWARD rips his shirt from his shoulder and shows RATSEY a scarred armpit.

HAYWARD

'Twas after that my head began to hurt so. After that.

RATSEY

Now there's a miracle. There can't be a hundred in all England who've had it and lived. And two of us is here.

Pondering the ways of the world, RATSEY saunters out into the alley.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

We see RATSEY exit the Pye and settle to his meat and drink upon a small barrel. A shadow falls across him. Looking up, he sees DAN, the hangman's assistant.

RATSEY

How's young Mortimer?

DAN

Oh it's you. They buried him last night. Me, I'm looking for work. All public hangings is stopped, did you know? I must've walked over half London and there's a hundred men for every opening.

RATSEY

I'm onto something steady here, meself.

DAN hungrily licks his lips as RATSEY takes a bite of meat and loudly chews it.

DAN

I wasn't even able to buy food for my family yesterday. We'd planned on eating you. That's how we speak of it in the craft.

RATSEY

Very colourful.

DAN

What's going to happen to my wife and little ones I don't know.

RATSEY

Starve to death, sounds like. If the plague don't kill 'em first.

DAN

Don't say that. I couldn't bear it.

RATSEY

Maybe you won't have to mate. Might kill you first.

RATSEY laughs immoderately. DAN leaves him, cursing.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Hangman.

He spits.

EXT. COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS. DAY.

HARRY's coach stands before a small, stately building. HARRY is hurrying up the steps.

INT. OFFICE OF COLLEGE PRESIDENT. DAY.

In the handsome room, littered with busts of medical deities, SIR EDWARD ALSTON, fleshy, middle-aged and highly successful is packing the gold head of his cane, actually a scent-box, with a pinch of this and that from various jars before him.

HARRY enters.

HARRY

I beg your pardon.

Startled, ALSTON claps the head of his cane shut and holds it to his nose as he fearfully backs away from HARRY.

ALSTON

There's no plague in your home?
You've not got it? Your parish is
free from infection?

HARRY

No, no, I'm Harry Poyntz, Alderman of
St. Barnabas. I'm looking for the
President of the College of
Physicians.

ALSTON

I am Sir Edward Alston.

He starts stuffing documents into a travel-bag.

ALSTON (CONT'D)

I've been besieged by people at every
step. Many who come directly from a
victim's death-bed. Can you imagine?
No consideration at all.

HARRY

The Lord Mayor told me you're devising
effective measures against the
epidemic.

ALSTON

Oh yes. Tremendously effective.

HARRY

I'm very concerned, naturally -

ALSTON

Of course you are. Of course.

HARRY

I can't tell you how relieved I am to
hear from your own lips there's
something we can do.

ALSTON

Plenty to do. Got one of these?

ALSTON shows HARRY the gold head of his cane.

ALSTON (CONT'D)

It's a scent-box, you see? Fill it
with wormwood, rue, thyme, even garlic
and take a deep breath whenever you
suspect you're in the vicinity of the
disease.

(MORE)

ALSTON (CONT'D)

It helps combat the effluvia, the invisible little beasties in the air that carry the sickness. A garland of roses about the neck is extraordinarily effective. Fill your pockets with posies; that helps, too. Or a dead dried toad -

HARRY

Sir Edward, my wife is expecting our first child in August -

ALSTON buckles his travelling bag as he speaks.

ALSTON

Oh don't fret about it, this is what you do. Keep the good lady indoors. Bar doors and windows, then purify the air inside the house. Burn noxious materials night and day - pitch, tar, brimstone, old shoes. If anything untoward happens to your wife and child I shall be very much surprised.

HARRY

Sir Edward -

ALSTON

I must be off. My patients have all gone to Oxford and I should be derelict in my duty if I did not join them at once. Goodbye, goodbye. Don't worry. Joy, Temperance and Repose, slam the door on the doctor's nose, eh?

He's gone, cane stuffed tightly up one nostril. A dry chuckle is heard. HARRY turns and sees DR HODGES at a bookshelf in a far corner.

HARRY

Am I to take it you have no faith in his recommendations?

HODGES

Who am I to doubt the words of Procopius who devised those tremendously effective measures six hundred years before Christ? And applied them too, tremendously effectively, until the Black Death killed him and twenty million more.

HARRY

There must be a way to combat it -

HODGES

How can we find that when we cannot say what causes it Harry? We know it always starts with the poor and we know it often stops with the coming of cold weather, but beyond that -

HARRY

I refuse to be told that there's nothing to be done.

HODGES

Oh, there's much you can do. Isolate yourself in your house, never look at the ugliness outside. No? What about choosing a scapegoat, piling all your sins upon it and stoning it into the desert? Too bad there are not enough Jews in London to matter.

HARRY

I will not have you mock me.

HODGES

Then take my advice. The best preparation for the plague is to run from it. Get out. Like Alston. Like most of the other physicians. Like me.

HARRY

You? You're leaving us?

HODGES

I'm going back to Montpellier where I studied. I can teach there and be of some use. You've heard me say time and again that's what I'd do when I could do nothing else. And I've reached an age where I can do nothing else.

HARRY stares at him, full of fear and rising rage.

HARRY

By God, I hope you go straight to hell when you die.

HODGES looks searchingly at HARRY for a moment, noting his savage mood.

HODGES

Ah well Harry, heaven for holiness and hell for company. What would be the good of my staying?

HARRY

You - could comfort us at least. Comfort us by your presence.

HODGES

Why should I? What are most of you anyway but producers of dung? Besides, I've already experienced a plague. In Italy, before you were born. And what I saw then filled me with no great love for my fellow men. You wait, Harry, wait, and you'll swear it's only by chance they wear human form and but for this, one might class them with beasts.

HARRY turns in disgust. HODGES calls after his retreating back.

HODGES (CONT'D)

Don't be a fool Harry. Run. Run. Run.

EXT. LONDON STREET. EVENING.

LAWRENCE, preceded by his MACE-BEARER afoot, parades the street.

SPECTATOR ONE

God Bless you, Jack.

LAWRENCE

God Bless us all, friend.

SPECTATOR TWO

I look for you each day, Jack. It gives me heart to stay.

A householder runs out with two mugs of wine. He hands one up to LAWRENCE.

HOUSEHOLDER

Your health Jack Lawrence. I drinks to it.

LAWRENCE

Thank you friend. I drink to yours.

HARRY comes running up as LAWRENCE drains his cup and tosses it back.

HARRY

John, I must speak to you.

LAWRENCE

I'm listening Harry.

HARRY

The King has fled, the Court has fled, so has the Parliament, the lawyers, most of the physicians. How can you justify asking me to remain?

LAWRENCE

The King has fled, the Court has fled, the Parliament and the lawyers and the physicians. How can you justify asking my leave to go?

HARRY

I am going, John. I'm going, I say.

LAWRENCE

No you're not.

HARRY

Fine me to my last penny. I don't care.

LAWRENCE

I know that wouldn't keep you, Harry.

HARRY

And it doesn't matter to me if I never hold office again.

LAWRENCE

I never thought it would, Harry.

HARRY

There's nothing, nothing, that can make me stay.

LAWRENCE

Yes there is Harry. You'll stay because you're good.

HARRY is stopped dead in his tracks. LAWRENCE ambles on.

HARRY

Damn you, John. Damn you.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

Householders sweep before their homes, watching the traffic pass which now includes, among the coaches, poorer folk, pushing barrows with their meagre possessions, children in their arms and the elderly on their backs. HARRY and PROTHERO on a round of inspection, are moving towards the Pye. HARRY appears calm but there's a new tightness in his jaw and an anxious furrow to his brow.

HARRY

Did I hear a voice at your door during the night?

PROTHERO

It was someone requesting a health certificate.

HARRY

At four AM?

PROTHERO

People wake up in a sweat and decide they cannot stay in London another minute. If they can prove they're not from an infected house, I haven't the heart to turn them away.

HARRY

You cannot work night and day. We'll engage another clerk.

PROTHERO

The parish cannot afford it.

They walk on.

Outside the Pye, an ostler holds a baggage-laden horse for HODGES. SAM, in his grocer's apron, is holding up a bottle of brandy as farewell.

HODGES

What would I do with it Sam? One sniff of brandy would be the death of me.

SAM

It's medicinal, isn't it? Take it for your patients.

HODGES opens his saddle-bag. HARRY and PROTHERO reach the Pye. HARRY makes a show of inspecting the filthy stoop in order to avoid HODGES's eye.

HODGES

I'm leaving now Harry. I doubt we'll ever meet again.

HARRY ignores him, and moves on with PROTHERO. HODGES shrugs and goes back to stowing the brandy in his saddle-bag.

HARRY and PROTHERO stop to speak with BETTY and JASPER in front of their spick and span establishment. BETTY indicates a poor family in the passing traffic.

BETTY

That's the Wickses. Mrs Wicks!

The poor MOTHER turns and smiles weakly.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Where are you headed?

MRS WICKS

To my mother's in the North.

BETTY

Have you provisions?

MRS. WICKS

Little enough.

BETTY flies into the shop as the WICKSES wait hopefully.

JASPER

(sotto voce to Harry)

It's a good thing she don't know 'em all, else we'd be out of stock by lunchtime.

BETTY flies out again with a sack of bread for the WICKSES then she re-joins HARRY and PROTHERO.

BETTY

What's to become of them all? Heaven knows there's danger from plague, but the road - her mother's in Sunderland for God's sakes - there's highwaymen and hunger and - oh I can't be thinking on it -

She goes back into the Bakery, muttering. HARRY calls after her.

HARRY

Well you've the cleanest stoop in Harrow Alley, Bet, well done.

HARRY is about to move on when he notices JACK FEENY who is hovering on the periphery of what is now a continuous fixture - the crowd around SOLOMON EAGLE. We see that DAN has become a member of this crowd.

HARRY (cont'd)

Mr. Feeny -

EAGLE

-- and when they shall have finished their testimony the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them and shall overcome them and kill them and their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city --

HARRY

Mr Feeny, will you please attend to me and not to that nonsense.

FEENY

There's much in what he says, Alderman. I do not understand it all myself but there's much in what Eagle says. 'Tis deep.

HARRY

Is it as deep as the shit on your doorstep Mr Feeny?

FEENY

You leave me alone! The time for atonement has come. Look to yourself Alderman and stop pestering the meek -

EAGLE

-- and they stood upon their feet and great fear fell upon them which saw them and they heard a great voice from heaven ...

Suddenly an astonishing thing happens. For the first time in twenty years, and with some effort, SOLOMON EAGLE raises his eyes from the ground and looks to the sky. Everyone follows EAGLE'S gaze, including HARRY, but except HODGES, who watches it all with detached amusement.

EAGLE (CONT'D)

An angel in white. With a flaming sword in his hand. Do you see it?

A WOMAN

I do. I see it plainly.

A MAN

Yes. Yes. There's the sword, as plain as can be.

EAGLE

And look, how he points that terrible sword at us.

ANOTHER WOMAN

(shrieking)

I see it. Oh spare us.

HARRY

There is nothing there.

DAN

You don't see the sword? It's there, Mr. Poyntz, right there.

HARRY

It's a scrap of cloud.

FEENY

It's God's anger. Dreadful judgements are at hand and the alderman denies it - he denies it!

FEENY points at HARRY from amidst the rising menace in the crowd. PROTHERO pulls HARRY away, as FEENY comes snarlingly towards him. HODGES catches HARRY's eye and grins at him. There is no saying where it might end but for the interruption, a piercing and sustained scream from the house opposite.

Everyone turns and sees a DELIRIOUS MAN, stripped of his shirt, who runs out the front door, almost under the hooves of a coach-horse, and there sinks to his knees, beating his head in agony upon the cobbles. Clustered in the doorway from whence he came are a MAN WITH A HOT POKER and several WAILING WOMEN.

The COACHMAN heaves his team round and detours it down a side-street, all traffic following it. Everyone, motionless 'till now, dashes helter-skelter into houses, shops and doorways. FEENY grabs EAGLE by the arm and hustles him into the Pye, followed by PROTHERO and many others. There is a slamming shut of doors and windows up and down the Alley, like scattered gunfire.

Silence.

HARRY looks round. CHANDLER is on the church steps, peering to see what has happened. HODGES has one foot in his stirrup, preparing to mount, just as the scream caught him. In every window and partly open door, a frightened face looks at HARRY to see what he will do.

CHANDLER hurries down the steps and runs toward the DELIRIOUS MAN, who now lies inert. HARRY takes a deep breath and moves to join him.

HODGES V/O

Stop - back, both of you. I'll see to him.

HARRY pauses. CHANDLER kneels beside the DELIRIOUS MAN and gently raises him, resting the bloodied head on his knee.

HODGES

(in self-disgust)

Damn, damn, damn.

HODGES takes out the brandy, glugs a vast tot and tosses it aside to shatter on the cobbles. Then he goes to squat next to CHANDLER. Examining the DELIRIOUS MAN, he addresses the MAN WITH A HOT POKER.

HODGES (CONT'D)

When was he taken ill?

MAN WITH HOT POKER

Three days ago.

HODGES

An icy chill at first? Then shivering?

MAN WITH HOT POKER

Yes, yes, we thought he'd never stop sneezing.

HODGES

After that convulsions and nausea?

MAN WITH HOT POKER

And then the swellings came.

HODGES

And you tried to burn them out.

MAN WITH HOT POKER

We were told it might save him.

HODGES

Why didn't you ask me? You didn't want anyone to know, is that it?

The MAN WITH A HOT POKER is silent.

HARRY

Is it plague?

HODGES

It's plague. Buboos or swellings under both arms, big as your fist. And his chest's covered with the tokens.

HARRY

Tokens?

HODGES

These little knobs. Mortified flesh. Hard as a bunion. They die within five hours after the tokens come. He's dead now.

The MAN WITH A HOT POKER starts to sob. One of the WOMEN keens.

CHANDLER

The Almighty and merciful Lord grant thee pardon and remission of all thy sins and the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(to Harry)

I'll have his grave readied.

CHANDLER heads for the church. HODGES crosses the arms over the chest of the body. HARRY cannot tear his eyes from the corpse.

HARRY

(calling)

Prothero. Prothero.

PROTHERO's head appears at the door of the Pye.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

He's dead.

PROTHERO pulls his head in. A moment later, the door opens wide and MRS TOLLIVER and MRS POVEY march out side by side brandishing their staffs of office. From HODGES'S position, looking up at them against the sky as they approach, they have a weird dignity.

HODGES

What the hell do you want you old
crows?

MRS TOLLIVER

We are here because we took the oath:
"Diligently to search the corpse and
report the cause of death faithfully,
honestly, unfeignedly and
impartially."

MRS POVEY

And then we gets our fee.

MAN WITH HOT POKER

Psst. Doctor. For God's sake, don't
say what it is - I'll give you every
penny we have. Doctor they'll lock us
in for forty days, in with the
infection. Doctor please, there are
four children in the house.

HARRY suddenly turns and runs to SAM's home.

HARRY

Sam? Sam?

He pounds on the closed door with his fists.

SAM V/O

Get away from that door.

HARRY

Sam, it's Harry.

The door opens a bit and SAM looks out.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Sam, it's come. I'll send Jem to you
as soon as -

SAM has levelled a pistol at his head.

SAM V/O

Nobody comes in here but me and my
family. We're staying inside 'till
it's over and I'll kill anyone who
tries to force a way in. Do you hear
all of you? Anyone who tries to come
in here, I'll blow his brains out so
help me God.

HARRY

Sam - please - you said -

SAM slams the door shut. The church bell starts to toll.

SAM V/O

Nan. Nan. Play that pretty song.

The music of a spinet begins inside. HARRY turns away in disbelief. HODGES catches his eye and grins the same mocking grin. HARRY runs to his own house.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

OKESHOTT, WILL and HARVEY step back from the front door as HARRY bursts in and dashes to the staircase at the rear.

HARRY

Mrs Poyntz. Mrs Poyntz.

JEM looks down from the upper floor landing.

JEM

I'm here, Mr Poyntz.

HARRY

The sickness is in the alley, do you understand? I order you to remain up there. Up there. You're not to come a single step below. Is Gosnell with you? She's to do the same. And close the shutters, you're not to look out into the street. Don't ask questions. Do as I say.

HARRY rushes back to the front door, to WILL and HARVEY.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

You're not to go up there. Ever. For any reason.

HARVEY

But we sleep up there.

HARRY

You'll sleep in the stable. Not another word, boy. Not another word.

HARRY leaves the shop.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

RATSEY, HAYWARD and TOBY, who is beside himself with fear, are lifting the corpse onto a broad plank. A CONSTABLE herds the MAN WITH A HOT POKER and the WOMEN back into the house with his staff. ANOTHER CONSTABLE nails shutters to the ground floor windows. HODGES is unloading his horse. A WATCHER with a halberd is standing by, ready to go on duty.

MAN WITH HOT POKER

No. No, please. It means our death.
You're sentencing us to death.
Please. Please.

The first CONSTABLE firmly shuts the door and padlocks it. HAYWARD is ready at his end of the plank.

RATSEY

(to Toby)

Take hold and off we goes.

TOBY is wiping the hands with which he touched the corpse on his shirt, as though they would never be free of the taint.

RATSEY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Hear what I said, you miserable,
cowardly little black lump? Take hold
or I'll skin you alive. Take hold.

RATSEY cracks TOBY on the back and hurls him at the plank. HAYWARD and TOBY lift it and, with RATSEY alongside, start toward the churchyard. On the way RATSEY sees the corpse's shoes are much finer than his. Discreetly, he whips them off, and hopping along, exchanges his.

The corpse gone, PROTHERO ventures out of the Pye and joins HARRY at the door of the quarantined house. And now that the Alley is clear, the procession toward the Gate resumes.

HARRY

(to the Watcher)

You must fetch them what they require.
Water, food, fuel, nurses and doctors
if they ask. Anything. But if even
one of them breaks out, I'll have you
whipped through the City.

Above, the middle floor windows open. The MAN WITH A HOT POKER, the WOMEN and CHILDREN appear, some crying, some dumb with apprehension.

MAN WITH HOT POKER

Pray for us. Pray for us. Oh God
what have we done?

PROTHERO hands a lump of red chalk to HARRY who steps to the front door and inscribes a cross. Below it, in large letters, he writes: LORD HAVE MERCY UPON US.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN. EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

Some weeks later. Three children are at play. Each wears a garland of roses around the neck as they trudge about in a little circle, holding hands.

CHILDREN

Ring a ring of roses, A pocket full of
posies, A-tishoo, A-tishoo, we all
fall down.

Suiting the action to the word and giggling, they fall down.

CHILD

Plague got you. You're dead.

And getting up, they play it again. There are now FOUR WATCHERS lounging at the padlocked doors of infected houses on either side of the Alley. A trickle of exodus flows toward the Gate, mostly afoot, mostly poor. Business is going on but not as usual. A quarter of the shops have closed, and only a few 'prentices bawl wares before those still open. Custom is thin.

From an upstairs window in the KILLIGREW house, DICKIE, bored and unhappy, watches the children. SAM finds him, pulls him away, then sees something below that alarms him. He twitches the curtain across. It is a young MOTHER with a baby's coffin in her arms. Followed by a few MOURNERS, she walks with unseeing eyes toward the churchyard.

A MAN coming down the Alley sees the wake and quickly crosses to the other side. There, ANOTHER MAN is heading his way. Seeing each other, they quickly raise scent-balls to their noses and in passing, give each other a wide berth.

The MOTHER and MOURNERS enter the church as HARRY slowly rides into the Alley wearing his chain of office. He has lost flesh, and although his features remain officially impassive, he is growing bone-weary. As he rides, he acknowledges the inhabitants of the Alley. An INMATE sits at one of the middle-floor windows of an infected house and HARRY checks his horse to speak to him.

HARRY
 Have you enough food? Water? Is
 there anything you need?

The INMATE shakes his head despondently and HARRY moves on. As he rides past the house of the first plague victim the WATCHER hails him.

WATCHER
 Mr Poyntz, sir. There ain't been a
 sound inside since I come on duty this
 morning. I've knocked but nobody's
 answering.

HARRY reins in.

HARRY
 The Stoners isn't it? Can't you raise
 the nurse? Fetch a ladder and look in
 at one of the windows. If you see no-
 one, open it and shout for them.

HARRY rides on and dismounts before the BUCKWORTHS' bake-shop.

INT. BAKE-SHOP. DAY.

JASPER kneads dough while Betty serves Harry.

HARRY
 One loaf please, Betty.

BETTY
 Just the one?

HARRY
 The 'prentices are going home. No
 trade, so I thought it best.

JASPER
 Any word of the sickness passing?

HARRY
 Almost 2000 dead last week. But it
 can't go on much longer. It must lift
 soon.

JASPER starts to cough, a terrible, racking sound that reels him out into the back.

BETTY
 (hastily)
 That's his bad chest, he's had it for
 months. It'll pass.

HARRY takes a coin and is about to drop it into a jar.

BETTY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Wait. The vinegar's dried up.

She refills the jar and HARRY drops in his coin.

BETTY (CONT'D)
D'you suppose that really disinfects?

HARRY
Probably not, but we must do what we
can.

BETTY joins in with the last words, it clearly being a kind of mantra. She drops Harry's change into the other jar and he takes it out.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

HARRY leads his horse from the bake-shop to his house. He passes SAM's house. NAN is playing the spinet. HARRY tethers the horse at his own front door and enters with the loaf.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

OKESHOTT, WILL and HARVEY are waiting for him in their travel clothes.

OKESHOTT
The boys and me will be going now,
sir. We've only been waiting to say
goodbye.

HARRY
Well. There's nothing to say, is
there, except God Bless. I couldn't
have asked for better 'prentices, or a
better journeyman-tailor. You know
we'll all be working together again as
soon as I can manage it.

HARVEY snuffles.

HARVEY
You've been like a father to us, Mr
Poyntz.

HARRY
Thank you Harvey. That's kind. Write
to me when you're home to let me know
you're safe. Goodbye.

(MORE)

HARRY (cont'd)
 God be with you. Mr Prothero's given
 you your health certificates?

They all nod and taking up their bundles, leave the shop. HARRY pulls himself up and goes to the stairs, tearing off a hunk of the loaf.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 Mrs Poyntz? Gosnell? I'm home. I've
 brought bread.

He puts the torn hunk on a small table and goes to the middle floor landing where he leaves the rest of the bread. He then returns to the shop and shifts the table to the bottom step, brings a chair and gets himself a knife and spoon.

GOSNELL, looking catatonic, descends to the middle floor landing and leaves a platter of grey-looking food and a mug of ale. She goes back upstairs with the loaf which she sets at another small table by the balustrade. She holds the chair out for JEM who comes to sit. JEM watches HARRY, who is sitting at his table in great weariness, rubbing at his eyes. GOSNELL places a similarly grey confection before JEM, before disappearing noisily.

JEM
 Are you well Mr Poyntz?

HARRY
 Yes, thank you, Mrs Poyntz. Well
 enough. And you?

JEM
 Yes. Thank you.

HARRY
 For what we are about to receive Lord,
 we thank thee.

HARRY takes some food and swallows manfully. JEM takes a swallow and puts aside her spoon.

JEM
 You're right. Gosnell is a terrible
 cook.

HARRY looks up, amused by the chagrin in her tone.

HARRY
 Oh I'm sure she does her best.

JEM glances at him wryly. She takes another small bite of food.

JEM
 (after a while)
 How do matters go in the parish?

HARRY
 Remarkably well, all things
 considered.

JEM
 What does that mean, Mr Poyntz?

HARRY
 I'd prefer you didn't trouble yourself
 about it.

JEM
 I don't think the child as yet
 understands what we say.

HARRY lays aside his fork to consider this.

HARRY
 Mrs Poyntz - my concern is not
 entirely for the child.

JEM gazes at him sadly. GOSNELL brings a lighted candle and
 sets it on the table between them. She clatters off.

JEM
 Why did you marry me?

HARRY looks up at her. He hasn't the strength to dissemble.

HARRY
 I found you beautiful. I knew
 you were reluctant to have me but I
 found you beautiful.

JEM
 Would you have married me without my
 dowry?

HARRY toys with his bread uncomfortably.

HARRY
 I don't know. I did want my own shop.
 Very badly. But I think I would have.

JEM
 Why? I gave you no reason to love me.

HARRY

Love? If men and women waited for love before marrying, the race would have died out long ago. Anyway I'm not certain I know what the word means.

JEM

It's the feeling you had for your dog. A tender concern for her well-being, the joy of playing with her, being with her.

HARRY

If that is what it means then I did not love you.

His honesty tumbles the words out, bluffly, almost roughly.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

I was more concerned for myself. I found you beautiful and I lusted for you - and that was all. I suppose I felt that love, if you will, would come to both of us given time. From being together. I imagine many men make that mistake.

JEM

When were we ever together?

HARRY looks up at her, flushed with discomfort. Outside a handbell approaches and passes.

RATSEY V/O

Bring forth your dead. Bring forth your dead. Dead cart's a-coming. Bring forth your dead.

JEM stiffens. Suddenly more aware of her than he has ever been, HARRY raises his voice.

HARRY

Did you hear the nightingale in the garden last night? I've never known such a summer for nightingales. Or for flowers. The town smells of lilacs wherever you go. I wonder if there's a connection. Between lilacs and nightingales I mean. Do you suppose -

JEM

Harry.

HARRY looks up mid-extemporisation to see JEM with a smile on her face.

JEM (CONT'D)

He's gone now.

HARRY

Who?

JEM laughs and shakes her head.

JEM

Just for that, tomorrow I will cook.
I think you will notice a difference.

HARRY

Thank you Jem.

JEM gets up with her plate. Before she goes she looks down at HARRY who's looking a bit cheerier.

JEM

Do you see how easy it is?

HARRY doesn't know what she's talking about. She walks off. He frowns in confusion, but then can't help looking up at the empty landing and smiling.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. NIGHT.

HAYWARD drives the dead-cart slowly over the cobbles. RATSEY rings the hand-bell beside him calling out all the while. TOBY precedes on foot carrying a torch. All three wear smocks. There are three corpses in the cart, one in a shroud, one bundled in a blanket and one fully dressed. The WATCHER at the Stoner house is on a ladder looking in at the open window on the middle floor. Waiting below are MRS POVEY and a new searcher of the dead, MRS HOARE.

WATCHER

(to Hayward)

Over here.

HAYWARD pulls up as the WATCHER descends and opens the padlocked door.

RATSEY V/O

Any alive in there?

WATCHER

I don't think so. I can't rouse the man, or the woman or the nurse.

RATSEY

Keep your fingers crossed then, we ain't had a chance at a house all day.

WATCHER

Lean pickings?

RATSEY

Not a sausage. Every corpse we found in the street someone else got to first. Empty pockets was all they left us.

TOBY puts the torch in the socket at the driver's seat and they all enter the house.

INT. FIRST VICTIM'S HOUSE. BEDROOM. NIGHT.

The WATCHER looks in, holding his lantern up in one hand and a scent-ball to his nose with the other. One of the KEENING WOMEN lies on the bed. A NURSE is in a chair, a bottle in one hand.

WATCHER

The woman's dead anyway. Nurse is drunk.

RATSEY goes over and shakes the nurse.

RATSEY

Joke's on you. She's dead.

WATCHER

Where's Mr Stoner?

MRS POVEY

(pointing to bodies)
Plague. Plague.

MRS HOARE

That's two fees.

HAYWARD goes to the bed and wraps the body in its sheet. TOBY hangs back in the doorway.

RATSEY

(to Watcher)
What rooms does you want?

WATCHER

The dining-room. My missus has broke most of our plates.

RATSEY

Right. The rest's ours.

(To Toby)

To work, damn you. Get them into the cart. Still frightened after all this time?

TOBY

You'd be frightened too, if you never had the plague same as me.

RATSEY

I ain't in no wise same as you, and don't you never forget it. Go to work I says.

As TOBY reluctantly approaches the NURSE, RATSEY loots the wardrobe. He finds nothing of note except a very fine hat. He examines it, clucking his tongue, and then throws it aside. TOBY watches curiously.

TOBY

Ain't you taking that? It's finer than yours by a long chalk, anyone can see that, I'd take it if I was you.

RATSEY

Well you ain't me, as I believe I was a-pointing out not long ago. Anyhow you don't swap a lucky hat for anything, however fine, and this -

Swiping his hat, with the broken feather from his head and smacking TOBY over the head with it.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

- is a lucky hat.

TOBY

Why lucky?

RATSEY

Saved my life, this hat.

He smacks it back on his head and TOBY gingerly picks up the fine hat and starts to put it on his head.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

You can't wear that. You'd look like
a pig in a frock. Put it in the cart,
it'll fetch a few bob maybe.

Sulkily, TOBY curses RATSEY in his mother tongue and gets to
work. The WATCHER comes in laden with plates.

WATCHER

No sign of the man yet.

RATSEY

That's where you're wrong friend.

RATSEY points to a rear window, where a rope made of sheet has
been fastened to the window. As the WATCHER hurries over,
RATSEY probes the mattress.

WATCHER

Escaped. The Alderman won't be happy.
Said he'd whip me through the town.
What'll I do?

MRS HOARE

Get a drink? Come on dear.

MRS HOARE and MRS POVEY leave. RATSEY rips a purse out of the
mattress. He pockets a diamond ring and a gold locket, and then
divides the coins in the purse between himself and HAYWARD.
HAYWARD lifts the body off the bed. TOBY lifts the NURSE.

RATSEY

Are we set? Then shall we shog?

And he leads them off, singing a rude sea-shanty.

INT. HARROW ALLEY. NIGHT.

They exit with the bodies. As HAYWARD and TOBY toss them into
the cart, RATSEY removes his smock, flings it into the cart and
takes from it a magnificent gold-headed cane. Everything he
wears is gorgeous - apart, incongruously, from his dusty ragged
hat.

RATSEY

That does it for today. Fetch the
harvest to the Sexton, stable the
horse and I'll see you at the Pye.

Fluffing his jabot, he swaggers off into the tavern.

INT. PYE TAVERN. NIGHT.

Trade is brisk. The room is crowded and noisy with riff-raff. STREET MUSICIANS play a jig. People dance, a TIPSY TENOR sings on a table, the crowd join in with the chorus. RATSEY enters and strikes a pose. Many salute him enthusiastically. BECK sits on some RUFFIAN's knee. RATSEY pushes his way to the bar where MAG FEENY is slaving. She cocks an ear to his whisper and replies with an irritated gesture: upstairs. RATSEY makes for the upper floors.

INT. PYE TAVERN. UPSTAIRS. NIGHT.

Outside an attic door, RATSEY takes out the diamond-ring, polishes it on his cuff, and then knocks.

INT. ATTIC. PYE TAVERN. NIGHT.

The attic extends over the length and breadth of the tavern. Solomon Eagle has been enthroned upon an armchair atop a crate, a velvet cloak about him. The attic is full of True Believers in a state of hysteria. A few, JACK FEENY and DAN among them, are practising self-flagellation.

EAGLE

And let the evil amongst us show themselves.

FEENY

The evil amongst us!

EAGLE

Let them show themselves that they may be punished.

In response to the knocking, FEENY backs toward the door, not stopping his devotions for a moment.

EAGLE (CONT'D)

He that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword.

FEENY

Must be killed, oh must be killed.

INT. OUTSIDE ATTIC DOOR. PYE TAVERN. NIGHT.

RATSEY holds up the ring as FEENY appears and listens to RATSEY with one ear and to the revelations with the other.

RATSEY

How much will you give?

FEENY

Oh he that bears the number of the
beast shall stray amongst us two
pounds ten.

RATSEY

It's worth seven if it's worth a
penny.

FEENY

Shall stray amongst your lambs Oh Lord
take it or leave it it's the best I
can do.

RATSEY

I'll take it.

FEENY, lashing himself, takes coins from his pocket and gives
them to RATSEY.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Are you in the market for furniture?

FEENY

Strike him down oh merciful Father we
beseech you too hard to handle and
there ain't much demand.

He slams the door in RATSEY's face.

INT. PYE TAVERN. NIGHT.

The music has stopped. BECK is still with her RUFFIAN. TOBY
and HAYWARD are at the bar. RATSEY comes down and pauses on the
landing.

RATSEY

Mrs Feeny. Here. Drinks for all.

He tosses her a piece of gold. The crowd cheers him. RATSEY
flings coins to the MUSICIANS.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Let's hear it good and loud.

The DRUMMER scrambles for the coins as the FIDDLER and BAGPIPER
start to play. Couples come to the floor. RATSEY takes the
gold locket from his sleeve and makes his way to BECK. Coming
up behind her, he dangles the locket in front of her nose. As
she squeals with delight and reaches for it, the RUFFIAN
menacingly gets to his feet. Off-handedly, RATSEY raps his head
with the cane and drops him like a side of beef.

RATSEY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Like it darling?

BECK
It's a love. Is it for me?

RATSEY laughs and starts to pull her towards the stairs.

BECK (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Don't be so sudden.

RATSEY
It won't be sudden. I means to dance
with you first.

RATSEY and BECK join the whirling throng. RATSEY then pulls BECK towards the stairs, plastering his lips upon hers. Suddenly, HAYWARD screams. The MUSICIANS stop, the DANCERS stop, even RATSEY stops. All eyes are on HAYWARD as he totters a few steps, clawing at his shirt and ripping it open before collapsing at RATSEY's feet.

MRS FEENY
My God. He's covered with the tokens.

RATSEY
WHAT?

RATSEY bends over to examine HAYWARD.

MRS FEENY
Heave him aside, someone.
(to musicians)
You lot. Get on with it.

The music and dancing resume. RATSEY straightens, his face a study. Then he rushes towards the front door.

INT. HODGES'S ANTEROOM. NIGHT.

Despite the hour, the walls are lined with waiting patients. As HODGES leads one to the door and sees him out, another comes forward.

HODGES
You'll have to excuse me for a moment.
I need nourishment.

Slack with weariness, HODGES enters his bedroom and shuts the door.

INT. HODGES'S BEDROOM. NIGHT.

HODGES takes a bottle of brandy and raises it to his lips. After several swallows, he puts his hand to his heart and marks out the beat.

HODGES
Boom-bompa-boom. Boom-bompa-boom.

Looking doubtfully at the bottle, HODGES decides to have another swallow. RATSEY bursts in.

RATSEY
Dr Hodges. Doctor. You can't get plague twice can you? You can't get it again if you've had it.

HODGES
You damn well can.

RATSEY
But I thought -

HODGES
An old wives' tale.

RATSEY
Maybe it wasn't plague that he had before.

HODGES
Who's that?

RATSEY
Hayward. John Hayward.

HODGES
Yes, he once had it. When he was a boy. I treated him myself. But he survived in spite of that. Why?

RATSEY
He's got it again.

HODGES
It will be the last time, take my word. What does it matter to you?

But RATSEY has gone.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. SUNRISE.

Close on HARRY'S drawn face as he's wakened by a cock crowing. His face brightens and he smiles involuntarily. For a moment he can't think why. Then his eyes move to the upper floor. He flings off his blanket, gets off the work-table which is now a bed, and slips his feet into his shoes. He's fully dressed, bar his hat and coat. Yawning, he reaches for a pitcher of water and accidentally knocks the basin to the floor with a clatter.

JEM V/O

Harry?

HARRY

(looking up)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you.

JEM V/O

I've been up an hour. Breakfast is ready. Gosnell. Mr Poyntz is ready.

HARRY splashes his face hurriedly and goes to the table on the middle floor where GOSNELL has laid his dish. He brings it down to his table and sits. JEM peeks over the banisters.

JEM

Good morning.

HARRY

Good morning.

JEM

(sitting at her table)

Did you sleep well?

HARRY

I did. Better than I have in months. It was strange. Good Lord, we thank thee for thy Bounty this day, Amen.

HARRY takes a mouthful.

HARRY (CONT'D)

Has Gosnell been visited by the Lord? This is delicious.

JEM

Did I season it enough?

HARRY, realizing Jem has cooked it, looks up at her.

HARRY

To perfection.

JEM
I'll cook from now on.

HARRY
It's not too much for you?

JEM
It gives me pleasure.

HARRY
What about Gosnell? Doesn't she mind?

JEM
She hates cooking.

HARRY
Then - forgive me for asking - why did you hire her?

JEM
She's known me since I was little. I like her. She makes me laugh.

HARRY
Gormless Gosnell?

JEM
What is gormless?

HARRY does a passable imitation of Gosnell at her most gormless. GOSNELL suddenly appears behind JEM with a potty which she empties out of the window. As she disappears HARRY and JEM can't stop themselves from laughing - in JEM'S case at least, rather guiltily. Suddenly, HARRY sees something out of the front door and rises, grabbing his coat. JEM'S face falls.

HARRY
Wait - there's something I must see to
-

He dashes off. JEM looks miserably at his unfinished porridge. Suddenly HARRY rushes back in looking up at her anxiously.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Please save my porridge. I'll be back very soon.

He pushes a quick mouthful in, and disappears. JEM relaxes with a smile.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. AM.

What has drawn HARRY out is the sight of the WATCHER from the Stoner house on his way to his new post, with a CONSTABLE.

HARRY
Hey! You!

The WATCHER recoils at the sight of HARRY.

HARRY (CONT'D)
I was told last night that you let Mr. Stoner escape.

WATCHER
It weren't my fault Mr Poyntz sir, he just took off -

HARRY
All right, all right. I've decided not to have you whipped through the streets. I'll take your word for it that you weren't bribed.

The WATCHER is manifestly relieved and surprised.

WATCHER
Oh thank you sir.

HARRY
But by letting Mr Stoner escape from an infected house you were remiss and I'm fining you a week's wages.

WATCHER
Oh yes, I knowed I'd be the one to suffer. Always the poor man. It ain't justice. Especially since Mr Stoner won't infect no-one in the parish seeing as he's left the City.

HARRY
Left the City?

CONSTABLE
I passed him through the gate meself.

HARRY
What? How dared you? He had no health certificate.

CONSTABLE

But he did. One of them new printed ones? Signed by you?

HARRY

Signed by me? I haven't even spoken to Mr Stoner since we locked him in.

WATCHER

Didn't he send me with a sealed message to your house day before yesterday? And didn't I get a sealed message back? Depends who gets the bribe; that's the heart of it -

HARRY

Are you telling me you brought me a sealed message from Mr Stoner, containing a bribe?

WATCHER

Well, I brung it to Mr Prothero. Same thing ain't it?

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

HARRY stands arms akimbo as PROTHERO gathers up the last of his belongings and nervously turns to him.

PROTHERO

Mr Poyntz, I'll return the favour one day, believe me.

HARRY

Don't insult me. Do you actually believe I've not had you arrested as some sort of favour? The morale of this parish is low enough without the scandal. They're my concern, not you.

PROTHERO

I wasn't the only one who did it. Many in this City now take bribes, why shouldn't I?

HARRY

Many in this City now die. Why shouldn't you? Dear God, get out of my sight.

PROTHERO leaves as boldly as he dares. Harry slumps.

JEM V/O
I'd comfort you if I could, Harry.

HARRY
Oh, it's nothing.

JEM V/O
Ah, share it with me. Share it.

HARRY
I mean, Prothero. For all we know he's responsible for spreading the plague God knows where. What's become of people? What'll become of this City if they all turn so? You know, Dr Hodges said this would happen, he said we'd all become beasts.

JEM V/O
Not all. He hasn't.

HARRY
True. That's true.

JEM
And there's an even better example. Look in the mirror.

HARRY looks up and smiles and then suddenly gets very embarrassed and leaves. CLOSE on JEM's face between the banisters smiling. The door closes and she runs to the window to look out for him. Cut to her P.O.V. of HARRY pulling his coat on outside. He stands very straight, his face still red and wearing a grin. He looks up at the window. JEM yelps and hides, but then is sorry she's done so and goes back to wave, but he's gone.

INT. PYE TAVERN. DAY.

A morning-after atmosphere. MRS. FEENY yawns with true exhaustion as she wipes up slops. TOBY takes the cloth for her, and wordlessly, makes her sit down while he takes over the job. RATSEY sits apart, still looking stunned by the implications of Hayward's fate. He and TOBY both wear smocks. PROTHERO enters and sets down his belongings.

PROTHERO
My morning draught if you please, Mrs Feeny.

MRS FEENY hauls herself over to the beer-barrels. PROTHERO gestures towards RATSEY.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
He's not himself is he?

MRS FEENY
Because of Mad Jack's death.

PROTHERO
Ah yes. Quite so.

Taking his ale, PROTHERO sits by RATSEY.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
Well, how does it feel to be mortal
like the rest of us?

RATSEY doesn't seem to hear him.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
Why should you take it so bad? You
must have faced death many times when
you were - what is it? - a gentleman
of the road.

RATSEY
(groping)
It ain't the same. It ain't the same.
When a man goes on the road, he faces
death, yes, but of his own free will.
But when you've got nothing to say
about facing death, when it might come
any time, not just when you invites
it, when it might come in spite of
you, no matter what you do, then it
ain't the same. No.

A cheery gent named ROPER interrupts this cosy discussion.

ROPER
Morning one and all. Roper's the
name. Sent to fill in for one
Hayworth? Haywig? Deceased? I've to
speak to a Mr Prothero -

PROTHERO
I am he - actually it's no longer my
concern, but you go with Ratsey here
and Toby there and you collect the
night's dead and fetch them to the
churchyard.

ROPER
No bother. Let's go mates.

RATSEY

What the hell are you so chipper for?

ROPER

First work I've had in two months,
that's what I'm so chipper for.

RATSEY

We starts by picking up the man whose
place you've taken. Let's hear you
laugh about that.

ROPER

I ain't worried. It'll never get me.

RATSEY

We've all heard that one.

ROPER

(touching his breast)
I got a powerful charm, see?

RATSEY gazes incredulously at ROPER, blows a gardaloo and rises.

RATSEY

Where is it Mrs Feeny?

MRS FEENY

Out back.

TOBY, RATSEY and ROPER exit the back door.

MRS FEENY (CONT'D)

Did I hear you say it ain't no longer
your concern Mr Prothero?

PROTHERO

You did. I've left office. I'm
setting myself up in trade. A man
wants to get ahead you know.

EXT. BACK OF PYE TAVERN. DAY.

HAYWARD's body lies on a large heap of refuse. (It's a wonder
anyone's still alive in the Pye.) A cautious way off, RATSEY
and mates stand shoulder to shoulder eyeing it.

ROPER

Ripe enough, for someone as only died
last night. Well - here goes.

But no-one moves.

ROPER (CONT'D)
You take him by the legs, and you take
him by the arms.

RATSEY
You take him, you're the one with the
bloody charm.

ROPER
(touching charm)
All right. Here I goes.

But no-one moves. Then ROPER sees a plank, gets it and sets it
at the front of the heap.

ROPER (CONT'D)
Roll him onto that. Go on.

RATSEY
You go on.

ROPER
I'm the one got the plank, ain't I?

ROPER grabs TOBY.

ROPER (CONT'D)
Go on, you heard me -

TOBY
No, please. Please. I can't no more.

ROPER snorts.

ROPER
Look at that. He's afraid. He's -

The words are cut off by RATSEY's grip on ROPER's throat.

RATSEY
So am I. So am I. So am I.

TOBY stares wide-eyed. RATSEY shoves ROPER aside and pushes
HAYWARD's body onto the plank with his feet. ROPER and TOBY
lift the plank and carry it off. RATSEY wipes the sweat from
his face and stares at a virgin sight - his own hands shaking.

EXT. OPEN FIELD. DAY.

Some weeks later. Great pits are being dug. Each is a hundred
feet long, thirty wide and nine deep. The Lord Mayor's coach is
by, and JOHN LAWRENCE leans out of it, speaking to HARRY who's
astride his horse reading a Mortality Bill.

In the background, workmen come out of the pits with sacks of earth on their backs, some directing black looks at Lawrence.

HARRY

Seventy-three parishes infected. Five thousand seven hundred and thirty-nine dead, of which four thousand three hundred and twelve of the plague. In one week.

LAWRENCE

But we still have a City. The Council of Alderman meets, justice is done, even the price of bread remains the same. And no one can as yet say we've not been able to bury our dead. There's cause for grief but not for loss of heart.

HARRY

Save the pap for someone who needs it, John. My heart is sound enough. I'm only wondering if we're doing as much as we might.

LAWRENCE

Why, what a lion you've become. Is this the man who was ready to run?

HARRY

Stop the bells, for one thing, John. They din death into our ears, even when we sleep. Order death-carts and burials for night-time only, so they aren't seen so much. Spirits are low enough.

LAWRENCE

Not yours it seems. Sound advice, Harry. I'll take it. But only if you tell me what's caused the change in you.

HARRY

Is it so marked?

LAWRENCE

My God, yes.

HARRY

I have fallen in love with my wife.

LAWRENCE lets out a roar of laughter, which fades upon seeing HARRY's rather chagrined look.

LAWRENCE

And she with you?

HARRY

Oh. I haven't dared to hope. My own feelings are almost more than I can bear. I should be ashamed I suppose, for knowing happiness at a time like this.

A gob of mud strikes the coach-door. HARRY and LAWRENCE turn toward the WORKMAN who's thrown it.

WORKMAN

Is this what you have in store for us? Are you going to bury all of London in 'ere?

A FOREMAN restrains him.

HARRY

I would pay that no mind, John.

LAWRENCE

I won't. They must let it out at someone.

(To his coachman)

Home, David.

(to Harry)

What you feel, Harry, is nothing to be ashamed of. To the contrary, it is a cause for general rejoicing. For if a man falls in love with his own wife, surely the millennium is at hand.

LAWRENCE's coach lurches off towards the City walls. HARRY follows at a lope, until he sees, running towards him, a CONSTABLE of his parish.

CONSTABLE

Mr Poyntz! Mr Poyntz. It's your wife. Her time has come.

HARRY digs his spurs in and passes the coach at full pelt.

INT. BAKE-SHOP. EVE.

BETTY looks up as HODGES comes downstairs with his kit.

HODGES

I mince no words, Betty, you know that. Your man is very ill. He has the Consumption.

BETTY

Oh thank God. I mean -

HODGES

I know what you mean. But it is serious now Bet, you'll have to nurse him day and night. The greatest difficulty will be to keep him in bed, he seems desperate to get bread out to our miserable parishioners.

BETTY tries not to cry.

BETTY

He's a good man alright.

HODGES

Useful at any rate. If only I could say the same of myself.

HARRY bursts in.

HARRY

Where the hell've you been? I've been hunting you for hours. Jem's in labour. Come on, hurry.

HARRY tries to pull HODGES out of the shop.

HODGES

You don't want me.

HARRY

(looking at him)
My God, you're drunk.

HODGES

Of course I'm drunk. But you don't want me sober either.

HARRY

What are you talking about? Come on. I don't know how to deliver a baby.

HODGES holds up his hands.

HODGES

Look. I've seen more than forty patients dying today. With these hands, I've wiped the death-sweat from their faces, lanced the buboes and held their heads while they vomited.

(MORE)

HODGES (cont'd)

Do you suppose a baby's prepared to withstand all that? Get a midwife.

HARRY

I can't. I tried to when I couldn't find you. Think of something else -

HODGES

I can't. Drink?

HARRY

Betty, can you -

BETTY

Oh Harry, Jasper needs me -

But HARRY is already off.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. EVE.

HARRY races from the bake-shop to the KILLIGREWS' and pounds upon the front door.

HARRY

Sam. Sam. Sam. Jem is having the baby. Let Sal be the mid-wife. I beg you. There's no-one else, Sam, please, for God's sake, do you hear? Sam! Sal!

Inside the KILLIGREW house the spinet strikes up. HARRY kicks the door with despair and rushes back to the shop.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. EVE.

HARRY flies in.

HARRY

Gosnell! Gosnell. Gosnell.

GOSNELL looks calmly over the banisters, a sheen of sweat on her face.

GOSNELL

Where've you been?

HARRY

Where've I - ? I've been to find a bloody doctor, you slack-faced nelly. Where d'you think I've been?

GOSNELL

There's no need for language.

HARRY

How is she?

GOSNELL

In pain.

HARRY

Alright, now listen to me, you're to help Mrs Poyntz have the baby - there's no-one else - so do as I say or I'll tear you limb from limb - what you need is -

GOSNELL

Hot water. Towels. Sharp, clean knife. Thread. Clean cloths, sheets. A bit of calm. 'Tis all ready Mr Poyntz, don't fret yourself.

HARRY stands with his mouth hanging open.

GOSNELL (CONT'D)

What I was trying to tell you, Mr Poyntz, afore you ran off in a tizzy, was I've seen many a bairn into this world, and delivered 'em, and calves too which is harder 'cos you're in up to your elbows. So don't fret, all's well, right way up and everything.

There's a pause. HARRY is transfixed.

GOSNELL (CONT'D)

You'll want to shut that Mr Poyntz, else something unwholesome'll fly in.

She indicates HARRY's wide open mouth. JEM screams.

GOSNELL (CONT'D)

Get along with you. We're working here.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. EVE.

RATSEY comes out of the Pye, and after some hesitation knocks at the door of Merlin's house. JEM'S labour can be heard. AZAZEL opens the door.

AZAZEL

Come in. You are expected.

RATSEY

What d'you mean, expected?

AZAZEL
The stars foretold it. Merlin is
ready to receive you.

INT. MERLIN'S STUDY. EVE.

The room is furnished for quackery, with zodiac signs, black velvet, skulls and an alligator hanging from a beam. MERLIN sits in meditation. AZAZEL ushers RATSEY in, bowing as he approaches.

AZAZEL
The man is here, Master, as you
predicted.

MERLIN's one eye pierces RATSEY.

MERLIN
Leave us.

AZAZEL
Yes Master.

Bowing himself out, AZAZEL closes the door.

RATSEY
Look here, I wants -

MERLIN
To avoid dying?

RATSEY
I've heard tell -

MERLIN
That I can help you? I know. Sit.
Some who yet survive attribute their
lives to my Arabian Abracadabra Amulet
which sells for one shilling.

RATSEY
Aach.

MERLIN
But you, I was about to say, would not
be one of them. Others, who are good
enough to credit me with their
continuing health, daily drink a
bottle of Iridescent
Constantinopolitan Cordial, on which I
make no profit even at the price of
five shillings.

RATSEY

Muck.

MERLIN

But you, as I was about to observe,
would not be among them. Still others

-

RATSEY is on his feet, his hands on MERLIN's throat, holding him half-way out of his chair.

RATSEY

Don't play games with me, don't think
you can gull me as you do the rest.
I'm a member of the Brotherhood myself
and there ain't a quack born who can
take me in.

MERLIN remains impassive, even amused.

MERLIN

Then why have you come?

RATSEY releases MERLIN, unsure of the answer.

RATSEY

I don't believe in charms and amulets
and plague-waters. There's no good in
them. There's no good in them, I say.
Is there?

MERLIN sits as motionless as a spider.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

They're fools who believe and you
knows it. You knows they're fools,
don't you.

MERLIN remains still.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

I scorns 'em. But what if there
really was a magical way to escape
death? You sit there, calm as the
devil hisself and it don't seem to
touch you. Are you helpless as I am?
Or do you have something you yourself
uses? Do you? Answer me!

In a passion, RATSEY picks up a skull and threatens to bring it down on MERLIN's head. MERLIN remains impassive.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
I wants the real thing, if there is
one. The real thing!

MERLIN makes no response. RATSEY drops the skull to the table.
Then:

MERLIN
It's very expensive. Crushed pearls
are just one of the ingredients.

RATSEY
Price don't matter. If it's the real
thing. Is it?

MERLIN slowly smiles and nods.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. EVE.

JEM gives a roar, louder than anything before. HARRY, who has
been pacing, flies to the stairs to look up. There is silence
for a few moments. Then a baby's cry.

HARRY
Gosnell. Gosnell.

No answer. HARRY beats his hands together, paces and tries
again.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Gosnell. Gosnell.

Still no answer.

HARRY (CONT'D)
Oh please God. Please. Please.
Please. Please. Please. Please.
Please.
(louder)
Gosnell.

GOSNELL's red face appears calmly at the landing.

GOSNELL
Yes Mr Poyntz?

HARRY
How is she? How is she?

GOSNELL
She's knackered.

HARRY almost weeps with relief.

HARRY

But -

GOSNELL

Resting easy. Be a help if you'd stop stamping about shaking the place up though Mr Poyntz -

HARRY

Yes I'll stop, I'll stop -

GOSNELL

It's a little boy, by the way.

HARRY

Oh. Oh. How is he?

GOSNELL

Looks alright to me. You never can tell though. Once I saw a new bairn turn blue -

HARRY

Yes, yes, thank you Gosnell, go back to her, she needs you.

INT. BEDROOM. HARRY'S SHOP. EVE.

JEM lies in bed with the baby. GOSNELL comes back in clucking. She smiles fondly at JEM.

GOSNELL

That was a nice bit o' pushing missus, very nice.

JEM

What did he say?

GOSNELL does an imitation of HARRY looking up, hands clasped at her breast.

GOSNELL

"How is she? How is she?"

She chuckles.

JEM V/O

He asked after me before the baby?

GOSNELL

Didn't seem to be bothered about the baby. Didn't even ask what kind it was. After all that tizzying.

GOSNELL moves around the room, muttering and clearing up. JEM lies back, an exhausted smile on her face. FADE OUT.

FADE IN. EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

Some weeks later. A rather handsome coach is making its way slowly down the Alley. As it passes the Pye, we see RATSEY pauses in his labour of sweeping to hoik out a little glass-encrusted bottle from the depths of his raiment. Looking about him with suspicion, he raises the bottle to his lips and takes a swig. He returns it to its hiding-place with great care and continues to sweep. As the grand coach continues down the Alley, we see that trade seems to be at a standstill. Almost all the shops are closed and there are no 'Prentices, no Food-Vendors and very few Customers. The exodus has ended. A score of houses now have Watchers outside them - the ones previously guarded are now boarded up. We notice that the bells of the City's parish-churches have stopped and the only sounds heard are the muted groans and laments of the quarantined. The atmosphere is hot, airless and desolate, the expressions of the people guarded and care-worn. Eventually, the coach stops outside HARRY'S shop, where some children are at play. We can hear the BABY babbling within. The coach door opens and out steps PROTHERO, carrying a small chest. He looks very well-to-do.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

HARRY is beaming up the stairwell at his infant son. JEM, dressed in her night-gown, holds the child for him to see.

HARRY

I think he recognises me.

JEM

Harry, he can't even see you.

HARRY

No, no he's just smiled.

JEM

That's wind.

HARRY

Nonsense, it was -

He breaks off as PROTHERO enters.

PROTHERO

Good day Mr Poyntz. May I be amongst the first to offer my congratulations -

HARRY
Get out of here.

PROTHERO
Willingly. I did think, though, that
you'd put aside personal differences
if you could save the parish money, I
know how low the coffers are -

HARRY glances up, but sensibly, JEM has taken the baby off.

HARRY
What are you talking about?

PROTHERO
The goods and services I can provide
at prices no competitor can meet.

He opens his chest.

PROTHERO (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Take this, for example.

PROTHERO takes out a stiff paper sign with LORD HAVE MERCY UPON
US printed on it.

PROTHERO (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Notice how clearly the words stand out
against the white background. Only
three shillings the gross. No? Then
have a look at this padlock. No
securer lock for a quarantined house
can be bought. Sixpence each.

HARRY
We need locks. I'll take a hundred.
At fivepence.

He stares hard at PROTHERO, who meets his gaze with remarkable
steadiness.

PROTHERO
One hundred at fivepence it is.
They'll be delivered to you first
thing in the morning. Now how are you
off for shrouds?

He pulls a shroud from his chest and models it.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
You can use it more than once, which
is something to bear in mind now the
plague's taking eight thousand a week.

HARRY

Shrouds are a luxury we've long since said goodbye to.

PROTHERO

Bad as that eh? Then you wouldn't be interested in coffins, I take it. Or horses for the dead carts? Scarce, very scarce. I've only a few left.

HARRY

Can't afford it.

PROTHERO

You might be interested in my rental-service then - cart, horse and handbell for only four shillings a day. No? Then I'll bid you good morning. The padlocks will be delivered as stated and my terms are cash only, no credit. Care for a sweet-meat?

HARRY shakes his head. PROTHERO pops a sweet into his mouth and bustles out. HARRY can't help chuckling at the absurdity of it.

EXT. HARRY'S SHOP. DAY.

PROTHERO throws a handful of sweets to the children. Gets into his coach and is driven off.

EXT. KILLIGREW HOUSE. DAY.

Little DICKIE can be seen watching the children scrambling for the goodies. Furtive-looking, he leaves the window. A few moments later there is the sliding of bolts at the front door. It opens and with a cry of joy, DICKIE runs to join the children. He sees a sweet on the cobbles and pops it in his mouth. He is enjoying it hugely when:

SAM V/O

(roaring)

Dickie.

SAM is standing at the door in shock. Behind him, NAN and SAL appear. They all look haggard. The children scatter. Frightened, DICKIE runs to the front door. As he reaches it, SAM slams it in his face.

SAL

No. No. Dickie. Let me.

NAN
Papa. You can't. Papa.

The door opens a bit and the hands of SAL and NAN appear at the edge as they strive to pull it open. But they're pulled away and the door shuts. The sliding bolt is heard. NAN and SAL scream endlessly. DICKIE slaps at the door.

DICKIE
(sobbing)
Let me in, Dada. Let me in. I won't
do it again. I promise. Dada, let me
in.

EXT. OPEN FIELD. NIGHT.

Black night. Full dead-carts roll toward the pits, men with torches preceding them afoot. Bearers and buriers do their work, some carrying the corpses down the ladders, some rolling them and some flinging the lighter ones. The night is filled with the creaking of cart-wheels, snatches of drunken song and idiot laughter.

The St. Barnabas cart is already being unloaded. TOBY and a BURIER remove the corpses and shove them over the lip of the pit. RATSEY has paused for a moment to take out the small bottle of the Real Thing and put it to his lips.

BURIER
Oh, I knew this one. Wealthiest man
in our parish. Know how much he left?

TOBY, hardly listening, shakes his head.

BURIER (CONT'D) (cont'd)
All he had.

The BURIER pushes the body over the edge, laughing immoderately and drags another from the cart.

BURIER (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Oh, she's a pretty thing, she is. Oh,
now this was something to cuddle with
on a frosty night. What a waste.

He calls to a WORKER in the pit.

BURIER (CONT'D) (cont'd)
Hey. Oswald. Have a look at this
little darling.

The BURIER tumbles the body over, and turning for another, addresses RATSEY.

BURIER (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 What about a hand, mate? Want us to
 shift all this meat ourselves?

RATSEY has drained the bottle. He licks the mouth of it, tosses it aside and goes to a body on the cart.

BURIER (CONT'D)
 No, we already has this one. Get your
 own. God knows there's plenty for
 all.

RATSEY reaches in, grabs the foot of another body and heaves. The corpse slides out and RATSEY finds himself staring into MERLIN's face, black eye-patch and all. RATSEY staggers back with a groan. He drops the body, the cart loses balance and topples into the pit. Amidst loud shouts of protest, RATSEY stands staring, rooted to the spot, his eyes wild with new terror.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. NIGHT.

HARRY lies on the work-table unable to sleep. It's very hot and he wears only his shirt. He shifts about and the table creaks.

JEM V/O
 Harry?

HARRY
 Yes?

JEM V/O
 Are you asleep?

HARRY
 No.

There's a pause.

JEM V/O
 It's so quiet. You can hear the
 river. Harry?

HARRY
 Yes.

JEM V/O
 Come here, let me see you.

HARRY sits up and casts about for his trousers.

JEM V/O (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 You don't need to dress for me Harry.
 I'm your wife.

Slightly disconcerted, HARRY protects himself with his shirt and goes to the stairs. He looks up at JEM who sits staring at him through the banisters, her nightgown damp from the sweat. JEM pushes her face up to the banisters.

JEM
 Well isn't that the way of it.

HARRY
 What?

JEM
 Now I want to, I'm not allowed to.

HARRY
 You want to - ?

JEM nods. She smiles. HARRY lets out a tiny moan and covers himself up anew.

JEM
 (whispering)
 Show me.

HARRY, torn between mortification and erotic desire, twists away. Then he finds his courage, lets his arms hang loose and turns back to her.

JEM (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 Open your shirt.

He obeys, unable to take his eyes off her. JEM devours his body with her eyes and lays her forehead against the banister with a sigh of frustration. Then she sits up and pulls the nightgown away from her breasts. HARRY takes a step forward on a gasp, one hand up in yearning. He rests it below the banister and looks back up at her with inexpressible longing.

JEM (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 Tell me - what you'd do - speak it.

HARRY tries to speak but cannot. Tears well in his eyes.

JEM (CONT'D)
 It won't be long. My love, it won't be long.

INT. PYE TAVERN. NIGHT.

The night's carouse is reaching its zenith. TOBY is alone at his corner table rocking back and forth. He looks up briefly as RATSEY sits down heavily on the bench next to him, and then resumes his rocking, a faraway look in his eye and the trace of a smile on his lips.

RATSEY

What be you thinking?

TOBY

Of home.

RATSEY

Where is it?

TOBY

Across the sea. An island called Jamaica. I don't want to talk about it with you.

RATSEY

What's it like?

TOBY

Clear blue sky. Clean blue water. White sand. Palm trees in the breeze. Sh sh sh, they go, like my mother did when I had bad dreams. Sh sh sh. Oh God, I miss it.

RATSEY

So do I.

RATSEY has started to rock with him.

TOBY

You've never seen it, man.

RATSEY

Even so. I can miss a place like that. Same as you.

TOBY

You ain't in no way same as me. And don't you forget it. That island's not for you man. All of us there has black skins. And black stinks.

RATSEY

Maybe our skins is different. And ours stinks.

(MORE)

RATSEY (cont'd)

But we suffers, both, and in the end
we dies. That we has in common,
Brother Toby. That we has in common.

They rock together.

EXT. LONDON STREET. DAY.

Most of the houses are boarded up. It's baking hot. A few WATCHERS sit in a stupor. Two or three bodies lie here and there, one uncovered. JOHN LAWRENCE sits slumped in a saddle. Nothing else moves until HARRY rides up to the LORD MAYOR.

LAWRENCE

Do you see? The night's are not long
enough to bury our dead. We're done
for, Harry. It's the end.

HARRY

Damn you John, it's not the end.

LAWRENCE

We've done all we can and it's not
enough.

HARRY

No. No. Light fires. Large ones.
Up and down every street. Brimstone.
Pitch. Tar. Keep them burning.

LAWRENCE

What's the good?

HARRY

Perhaps it will cleanse the air. Even
if it doesn't, it will lift our
spirits. We can't let them believe
there's no hope.

LAWRENCE

Even when there isn't.

HARRY

John. John Lawrence. Your Worship.
Damn you, lift your head and consider
what I've said.

LAWRENCE

Very well. Bonfires it is. In your
hands, Harry. And if it fails -

HARRY

If it fails, we'll think of something
else.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. EVE.

There are large drums filled with wood, coal and tar in the centre of the alley before every sixth house from the Gate to the Church and beyond. A WATCHER stands in readiness near each, burning torch in hand. Here and there along the Alley are great piles of fuel to keep the fires burning. HARRY gallops into the Alley, calling to the WATCHERS who seem to have been woken from their stupor by the energy and drive of their Alderman, who seems like a man possessed, for once, by a beneficent devil.

HARRY

Ready? Ready? All ready here?

We see JEM fly to the window. She watches HARRY dismounting, tying up the horse, taking a lighted lantern from a WATCHER and heading towards the house opposite, which is clearly abandoned.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Wait for my signal. Wait for it.

He enters the house.

EXT. ROOF. ABANDONED HOUSE. EVE.

HARRY emerges onto the roof through a trap-door with the lantern, and takes out his watch. He looks over to JEM at the window. He grins at her, and then - aware that all eyes are upon him - blows her a massive kiss. JEM leans out of the window.

JEM

Be careful up there.

HARRY

Is the door of the baby's room shut?
There's going to be a terrible stink.

JEM

All's safe. He's asleep.

HARRY glances at his watch again and springs to his feet. He swings the lantern about his head and shouts to the WATCHERS below.

HARRY

Now. Now. Start the fires. Now!

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. EVE.

The WATCHERS all toss their torches into the drums and flames leap up. Great clouds of black smoke rise.

EXT. ROOF. ABANDONED HOUSE. EVE.

HARRY surveys the Alley, the parish and the entire City. The sight is magnificent: fires burning in orderly lines, along every street, along London Bridge and across the Thames.

Suddenly, feeling something, he looks up and holds out his hand: it's raining. The drops come faster and faster, becoming a deluge. Lightning flickers and thunder crashes. By ones, twos and then tens, the fires in the City are quenched and there is only foul smoke. HARRY stands on the roof drenched. He looks up at the sky. We see JEM watching him from the window.

HARRY

What have we done? Dear God what have we done? Are you telling us there's nothing but Chaos? Are you telling us there's no purpose to any of it? That justice and mercy and pity are just dreams we've invented? What is it you want from us? What sins have we committed? For what must we atone? Tell us, tell us, because we cannot bear much more.

He drops down and sits staring about him in the rain. He looks at the window for JEM's face but she has disappeared. Slowly, like an old man, he picks up his lantern and rises. Then he hears a door slam, and glancing into the Alley, he sees JEM hurrying along.

HARRY (CONT'D) (cont'd)

Jem? Jem.

INT. ST. BARNABAS CHURH. EVE.

There are a few people in, some praying, some dozing. As JEM enters, a PENITENT confesses, beating his breast as he does so.

PENITENT

I confess. I confess. My father kept his savings behind a brick in the chimney. I stole the money and he accused my brother and drove him from the house. My father died blessing me as the good son. And now I confess my sin and may God forgive me.

The PENITENT sits weeping. No-one has paid any particular attention. JEM nerves herself and rises.

JEM

Before I married, there was a boy and we loved each other. But my father betrothed me to another - more important man, and we were desperate, the boy and I. We lay together - we didn't mean to, we were going to wait, but - it made us - and I conceived. I married the other and I let him think the child was his. But it - he wasn't. I freely confess it, I ask only for guidance so that I may know how to atone.

No-one pays the slightest attention. Panting with exertion JEM kneels for a moment, and then rises to leave. She turns to see HARRY standing in the doorway. He stares at her as though he's never seen her before in his life, and turns on his heel.

JEM (CONT'D)

Harry.

She runs after him.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. EVE.

JEM rushes out after HARRY.

JEM

Harry!

He strides along, gazeless.

JEM (CONT'D)

Harry, listen to me! That was before - it was before I - listen. Everything is different. I thought. I thought we -

HARRY's stride doesn't falter.

JEM (CONT'D)

Please. Oh Harry, please.

She struggles to keep up with him. Finally she gives up, and gulping back her sobs, watches helplessly as HARRY walks on without once breaking his pace.

EXT. HARRY'S SHOP. EVE.

A short time later, a coach stands with PROTHERO before it. The ashes of the dead fires still smoke. HARRY comes out of the shop looking blenched, with his money-box.

PROTHERO

The coach and horse will not remain in Dover, is that correct? Merely bring Mrs Poyntz to her father's home and return. Then that will be, let me see, six pounds will cover it.

HARRY opens the box and, in a daze, counts out the cash.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)

If I may say, you're very wise to send your family out of the City. You saw last week's Bill? Eleven thousand? Frightful. And no end in sight.

Cheerily, PROTHERO pockets his cash.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)

Thank you. And if there's anything else you require, you know where to find me.

PROTHERO whistles, marches up the Alley. HARRY re-enters the shop.

INT. HARRY'S SHOP. EVE.

HARRY puts his cash-box on the table and sits. JEM, GOSNELL and the BABY come downstairs dressed for travel. GOSNELL and JEM carry health certificates. The silence is funereal. JEM stops in front of HARRY but he doesn't look up. They leave. A moment later, with a crack of a whip, the coach rumbles off.

HARRY gets up, opens the cash-box and takes out all the money, stuffing it into his pockets. He stumbles out.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. EVE.

HARRY, hatless, still damp from the downpour and dirty from his climb, walks into the clouds of smoke as if into the mouth of hell.

INT. PYE TAVERN. EVE TO NIGHT.

Crazily drunk, RATSEY is having the time of his life. The crowd, scrambling to get out of the way and packed against the walls, is being treated to a brawl. Alone, and getting much the worst of it, RATSEY is battling half-a-dozen BULLY BOYS. They beat him into a corner, and onto the floor. At MRS FEENY's prompting, the MUSICIANS come out from behind the bar and begin to play. The crowd, bored with watching RATSEY get pummelled, turn back to drinking and dancing.

The BULLY-BOYS give RATSEY the heel a few times and wander off to join the revels. RATSEY hauls himself up, spitting blood and sits on a bench next to a completely DRUNKEN MAN.

RATSEY

Ah, that was a good one, that was.
That was a tonic.

The DRUNKEN MAN falls backwards onto the floor. RATSEY'S about to nick his drink when he sees HARRY walk in.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Bloody hell is it that time already?

RATSEY walks over to HARRY.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Sending the carts out early are we
Alderman?

HARRY looks at RATSEY in a daze. BECK runs up eagerly.

BECK

Mr Poyntz -

HARRY

Get me a drink will you? Strong.

RATSEY'S bemused. BECK goes off, a little chagrined at HARRY'S rough tone.

RATSEY

The Alderman drinking with the rabble.
That's a first ain't it?

BECK returns with a pitcher of gin. HARRY glugs it back, straight from the jug.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Blimey. What's up with you?
(Harry keeps drinking)
Easy mate. Easy there.

RATSEY sits at HARRY'S table, beckons for more gin, and regards HARRY with interest.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

I'll get this, Alderman.

For answer, HARRY pulls out his money and lays it all on the table.

HARRY

I don't need your money.

RATSEY looks at the coins and then adds his own purse-full to the pile. BECK returns with more gin which HARRY drinks fast.

RATSEY

(half to himself)

You know, it ain't right. They brings you up to think this is worth something. You're supposed to spend your life getting it any way you can. But it don't help with nothing important. Can't buy off death.

He takes up the coins in his hands.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

When I thinks of what I've done in my time to get my hands on some of this. And what is it? Shit.

He flings the coins into the room. There is a brief scramble for them. HARRY starts to laugh. The gin has gone straight to his head.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

What's the joke, friend?

HARRY laughs louder. Eager for any diversion, some of the crowd turn to look at HARRY, who rises, still laughing.

HARRY

My friends -

He assumes a mock-solemn expression.

HARRY (CONT'D)

"Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy and wealthy and wise."

A MAN

What's so funny?

HARRY

My friends -

Some have recognised the Alderman - and that the Alderman is drunk. People crowd round to stare.

HARRY (CONT'D)

"Every cloud has a silver lining."

He giggles and drinks more gin.

HARRY (CONT'D)

My friends - oh this is a good one,
you'll like this - "where there is
life, there is hope".

Now a few see what he's getting at and laugh with him.

MAN

"Ask and ye shall receive."

HARRY crows and points a jabbing finger as he rocks on his feet.

HARRY

"Where there's a will there's a way."

Now everyone laughs, and people start to call out proverbs that have long been rendered senseless by the extremity of their situation. "Honesty is the best policy," "When one door shuts, another opens," "Good deeds always have their reward," etc. The laughing continues as the MUSICIANS strike up, the crowd sings and HARRY grabs BECK, hurling away her tray, and whirling with her into the leaping, fantastical throng.

EXT. PYE TAVERN. SUNRISE.

A breeze fans the petals of a dandelion amidst the disappearing cobbles outside the Pye. Some RUFFIAN exits, throws up against the wall and staggers off cursing. The air is still dark with smoke.

INT. PYE TAVERN. SUNRISE.

You can almost smell the stale beer and sweat. A few lost souls lie on and under furniture. Flies buzz. RATSEY emerges from under a table, his finery covered in sawdust and other less palatable substances.

RATSEY

Christ.

He tries to wet his desiccated thrapple, grabs a tankard but there's only muck in it.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Beck! Beck! Find us some water and
something to eat - bread and water for
the love of Christ.

His voice hangs in the silence. Cursing his hangover, he hauls himself upstairs.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
Beck. Get up you lazy cow.

INT. UPSTAIRS. PYE TAVERN. SUNRISE.

RATSEY stops outside BECK's room for a dry-heave. Then groans and flings open her door.

RATSEY
Come on you -

She lies, naked, in a deep sleep. Facing away from her, in an attitude of despair, is a very naked HARRY.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
Ooh.

The sound seems to wake HARRY from his stupor and he rises to pull on his clothes.

HARRY
What does it matter? What does
anything matter?

This is muttered as much to himself as to RATSEY before HARRY stumbles off without so much as a backward glance at BECK. RATSEY looks at BECK, picking his teeth reflectively, before following HARRY out.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. AM.

RATSEY watches HARRY wander aimlessly off down a side-street, then staggers off in search of vittles. Outside the bake-shop, BETTY struggles to carry a sack of flour. RATSEY watches, sniffing the air.

BETTY
Help me then.

RATSEY
Eh?

BETTY
Help me get the flour in. Don't just
stand there.

RATSEY
Bread smells good missus.

BETTY
Want to buy a loaf?

RATSEY checks his empty purse. BETTY regards him irritably.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Just carry these sacks in and I'll
give you a loaf for your trouble.

RATSEY moves forward.

BETTY (CONT'D)
You'll have to wash first of all.

RATSEY moves backward.

BETTY (CONT'D)
I know your trade. Can't have a
corpse-bearer handling my flour unless
he washes. Oh come on, I'll add a
lump of butter.

RATSEY reluctantly heads for the door.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Wait. Round the back's where you
bathe. Go on.

EXT. BETTY'S GARDEN. AM.

A large wooden tub of water sits by the pump. RATSEY eyes it
with suspicion. BETTY joins him via the back door lugging a
cauldron of hot water.

BETTY
I've just had mine so you can get in
directly. I'll warm it up a bit.

RATSEY makes a low growl in the back of his throat.

BETTY (CONT'D)
What's the matter with you?

RATSEY
I'm a-wondering what this will do to
my health.

BETTY
Have you never washed all over before?

RATSEY
'Course not. Not since I were a boy
and went swimming. But I washed my
feet last Christmas and caught a cold.

BETTY

Well this won't kill you. My man had a bath every single day of his life from the moment he became a baker's 'prentice.

RATSEY

And where is he now? Six feet under, that's where.

BETTY shoots him a look. RATSEY shuffles beneath it, uncomfortable about what he's said. Tight-lipped, BETTY pours the water into the tub.

BETTY

There's many where he is now, and he was ill a long time, poor man. We've all just to get on as best we can.

RATSEY

What he bathe so much for anyhow?

BETTY

Bakers must be cleanly in their person. It's a rule of the Guild going back ever so far. My man was a sweet-smelling man. Like honey.

She looks at RATSEY with distaste.

RATSEY

Alright, suppose I tries it one limb at a time, see what happens.

BETTY

Oh get in. I need that flour for tonight's baking.

RATSEY

Where does I - ?

He mimes taking off his clothing, uncharacteristically bashful.

BETTY

Here.

RATSEY

Oh-ho. And where will you be Missus?

BETTY

For heaven's sake. A man's body is no great mystery to me even if I cared to ogle you, which I don't.

(MORE)

BETTY (cont'd)

I'll be round and about. That's the soap. I suppose you know what to do with it. Get on with it and I'll get you some clean clothes, those are for the bonfire.

RATSEY

Don't you touch my hat. That's my lucky hat that is.

RATSEY fingers his filthy finery with chagrin. BETTY goes and he begins to undress, glancing about himself suspiciously.

EXT. OUTSIDE THE PYE. DAY.

A BUTCHER unloads meat from his cart at the door. He looks up as HODGES suddenly hoves into view, touting his medical bag and a bottle of brandy, and lustily singing a vulgar song. He passes a corpse here and there on the way.

BUTCHER

Morning to you, Doctor, morning.

HODGES stops before the BUTCHER and bows elaborately.

HODGES

Ah, my fellow-butcher.

BUTCHER

I'm glad to see someone cheerful. What do you celebrate, if I may ask?

HODGES

I'm celebrating - something. But what? Don't remember.

BUTCHER

Success with one of your patients maybe?

HODGES

That would call for celebration if it happened. But it's so unlikely. Saul hath slain his thousands and Nathaniel Hodges his ten thousands.

BUTCHER

Ach, you're too harsh with yourself, Doctor.

The BUTCHER lifts a small tub from the cart, preparing to bring it into the tavern.

HODGES

Why, that's true, considering the marvel I performed not an hour ago. Imagine, a woman in the prime of life, dying of plague. All hope abandoned by one of my colleagues. And then, enter Nathaniel Hodges.

BUTCHER

You saved her life?

HODGES

No, no, I shared my brandy with her and thus saw to it that when she dies, for 'tis certain she will, she'll die happy. Uproariously happy. What have you there?

BUTCHER

Tripe. Why not go in and have them cook you some? It's a great soberer.

HODGES examines the tripe.

HODGES

I'll bet it is. Sobers me just to -
(he trails off)

BUTCHER

What is it Doctor?

HODGES

That tripe. Do you realise no-one has ever anatomized a plague victim?

BUTCHER

You mean, open one up and look at the guts? That would be death for certain wouldn't it? And what use would it be?

HODGES

Who can say what use it would be? One day.

A coach followed by a cart piled high with furniture rolls past into the Alley. Deep in thought, HODGES turns away from the BUTCHER and totters after it.

EXT. HODGES'S HOUSE. DAY.

The coach and cart slow and come to a stop at a neighbouring residence.

PROTHERO descends from the coach and, taking a key from his pocket, unlocks the neighbouring residence's door as the CARTER and his HELPER start unloading the furniture.

PROTHERO
 (to the Carter)
 Not so slap-dash with that table.
 That's mahogany, that is.

HODGES comes to his front door as the CARTER and the HELPER carry the table past PROTHERO into the house.

HODGES
 It's Prothero, isn't it?

PROTHERO
 Yes, it is. Good morning, Doctor.

HODGES
 I wasn't certain, you've grown so grand.

PROTHERO
 Well, we're to be neighbours, Doctor.
 I've bought the Rutland house from the heirs.

HODGES
 That's coming up in the world.

PROTHERO
 Only the beginning, Doctor, only the beginning. If a few business ventures prove successful, as they're bound to -

He breaks off as the CARTER and the HELPER come out of the house. PROTHERO calls to them.

PROTHERO (CONT'D)
 The bed goes to the large room on the right overlooking the garden.

HODGES
 You were saying?

PROTHERO
 Hmmm? Oh, if you've any money to invest, let me know and I can put you in the way of tripling it in six months.

HODGES
 Gold mine in Brazil? Indigo in the Carolinas?

PROTHERO

No, no, nothing so speculative. I prefer a safe bet. Coffins and wood for coffins here in the City. And horses. And linen for shrouds. I've invested every penny I own and all I could borrow besides. Let me know if you're interested.

HODGES

Very kind. Thank you.

HODGES fishes in his pocket for his key and comes up with a folded paper. Opening it, he reads briefly and then swings around to face the Pye.

HODGES (CONT'D)

This is what I was celebrating. Hey, Butcher.

But the BUTCHER is long gone.

HODGES (CONT'D)

Ah, well.

PROTHERO

Speaking to me?

HODGES

No, but you're welcome to it. Today's Mortality Bill. Only ten thousand dead last week. The plague's on the wane.

PROTHERO's mouth falls slack as he takes the Bill from HODGES. The CARTER calls to him.

CARTER

Where d'you want the dresser?

PROTHERO stares at the ornate dresser with an expression of bewildered fright. The wheels in his head are turning very quickly.

PROTHERO

Dresser? I ordered no dresser. Put it back.

And, to the protestations of the CARTER, PROTHERO starts to hustle the furniture back into the cart. HODGES stands, his key in hand, thinking hard. Then he seems to come to a decision and, stuffing his key back into his pocket, he walks swiftly away from the house.

INT. BAKE-SHOP. DAY.

HODGES runs in. RATSEY is wolfing bread and butter. He looks clean, though unshaven, and is wearing some of Jasper's old clothes.

HODGES
Betty, my dear, I have a favour to ask.

BETTY
Anything, Doctor.

HODGES
Is my memory correct? You read and write?

BETTY
I do.

HODGES
Would you mind doing a bit of writing at my dictation?

BETTY
Of course. Whenever you like.

HODGES
Almost certainly later today, perhaps tonight. I shall call for you -

And he's off, leaving BETTY and RATSEY staring after him.

INT. PYE TAVERN. DAY.

It is a picture of neglect. BECK is clearing up, weeping silently. FEENY, unshaven and unkempt, stands over her. HODGES enters in a state of urgent excitement.

HODGES
Jack Feeny. The very man.

FEENY
Betrayed. Betrayed by one and all, and now my child, my only child, offers herself in sin to my greatest worldly enemy, the Alderman Poyntz. It hurts, Doctor, and nothing your kind can prescribe will dull the pain you TROLLOP-

He swipes at BECK with a tankard but she avoids it and scoots upstairs.

HODGES

Feeny, I wish to speak to you about
your wife -

FEENY

The other snake in the grass. Run off.
Run off with the Blackamoor Toby - the
Blackamoor that the Alderman brought
to our house...

He spits. HODGES interrupts with increasing urgency.

HODGES

I'm sure he is. But let me ask you -

FEENY

(imitating Mrs. Feeny)

"Toby does not beat me. Toby does not
leave me to do all the work. Toby is
gentle and five times the man you ever
was in bed". Imagine that, Doctor.

HODGES

Yes. Very sad - but you do know that
Mrs Feeny is now very ill -

FEENY

Run off, the whore, because I spend my
days and nights listening to the
prophet, him with the earthly name of
Solomon Eagle, thirsting for God's
retribution upon the man with the
number of the beast which is six
hundred, three-score and six -

HODGES

Quite so, but I have just come from
your wife's bedside...

FEENY

Plague?

HODGES nods.

FEENY (CONT'D)

Just punishment. May she find peace.
God knows, I bear her no ill-will.
How near is the end?

HODGES

I cannot tell - it may be three minutes, it may be three hours but certainly by tomorrow she will be gone. What I'd like from you, as her next of kin, is permission to perform an autopsy on her body. It is vital I have your permission Mr Feeny, will you grant it? If you do I can begin the autopsy almost at the moment of death and my findings shall be that much more accurate.

FEENY

You want to cut her open?

HODGES

No-one has yet anatomised a plague victim, Mr Feeny. Who knows what it may teach us.

FEENY

Look to God for your teachings, Dr Hodges, not inside the corpse of a fallen woman. Cut her open, a horrible thought to a sensitive man. And she alone in the world.

HODGES

No no, not entirely, Toby is with her.

FEENY

Then you may cut her to ribbons for all I cares.

HODGES

That won't be necessary, but thank you, I shall bring the necessary certification for signature later -

FEENY

Where do I sign?

HODGES

Later.

HODGES leaves in a hurry.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. NIGHT.

HARRY wanders the streets with a vacant gaze and listless step. Finding himself at his own door, he stops. There's a whispering and a shuffling within.

He wanders in and sees that the place is being looted. He looks so like a looter himself that no-one pays him any mind. He walks upstairs. Two elderly women and a man are going through everything in the bedroom, taking whatever is to their liking. Harry watches without interest. One of the women comes across Jem's night-gown. She holds it up to herself, but almost immediately the other woman snatches it away. Then the man snatches it from her. The three start to argue, grabbing and pulling at the night-gown. The gown rips and HARRY suddenly goes berserk. He attacks them, and in a flailing whirl of arms and legs, they wheel towards the landing. All four fight savagely, and their weight against the bannister-rail causes it to creak and sway. Finally, with a loud crack, it gives way and they all fall into the shop. One of the women lands with a sickening thud on the work-table, her head striking HARRY's empty cash-box. HARRY gets up and chases the looters out, screaming like a lunatic. Behind him, he hears a man gasp. We see it's DAN, unkempt and wild-looking.

DAN

She's dead.

HARRY whirls around. HARRY walks past DAN and sees the WOMAN on the table, who is indeed dead.

DAN (CONT'D)

She's dead. You killed her. Like you killed my family. You stopped the hangings, Alderman. They're dead now, my chickens. All dead.

HARRY

Everybody's dead. You're dead. I'm dead.

DAN

You killed that woman, Alderman. You'll have to pay the price.

HARRY looks at him, suddenly understanding his situation. He runs out of the shop and up an Alley. DAN sets up a roar.

DAN (CONT'D)

Murder! Alderman's killed a woman!
Murder!

The curtains by SAM KILLIGREW's door twitch.

INT. BAKE-SHOP. NIGHT

HODGES runs into the bake-shop, calling out.

HODGES

Betty, my dear! Forgive the lateness of the hour! All is ready, come to my garden as soon as you can arrange yourself.

Running out, he almost trips over RATSEY, who's sleeping on an empty sack, his hat over his eyes. RATSEY grunts and re-settles himself. BETTY comes downstairs with a lantern.

BETTY

I thought you were going to sleep in the back?

RATSEY

I prefers it here. The smell's good.

BETTY

I'll be at Dr Hodges's.

She leaves, looking apprehensive. RATSEY alters his sleeping position.

EXT. HODGES'S GARDEN. NIGHT.

A coffin has been set to rest upon two saw-horses not far from the rear-door of the house. On a small table close at hand is a lighted lamp; neatly arranged about it are HODGES'S surgical instruments. Another small table has been set at the far end of the garden, laid with pens and paper. The night is cool and from time to time a dead leaf drifts from the trees across the scene.

HODGES enters the garden from the house with BETTY. He is alive with purposeful anticipation and excitedly puffing his pipe.

HODGES

There's your station, my dear - I hope I've explained everything to your satisfaction.

BETTY stops in her tracks and regards the coffin, her customary courage deserting her for a moment.

BETTY

You said there would be fumigation, Doctor.

HODGES

Oh. Yes. It's nonsense my dear, but if it soothes you -

HODGES stoops by the coffin and knocks the embers from his pipe into a porringer of sulphur, which, after a moment, begins to send up smoke.

HODGES (CONT'D)
There. You have it now.

Solemnly, BETTY skirts the coffin and goes to the writing-table.

HODGES (CONT'D)
Are we ready?

BETTY
Yes, Doctor.

HODGES removes the coffin-lid to reveal MAG FEENY's naked and ravaged corpse.

HODGES
Beautiful. Write this: that I've never seen a skin so beset with the tokens, both black and blue. They are more remarkable for multitude and magnitude than any I have yet observed.

As BETTY writes, HODGES sharpens a surgical knife. He stops, hearing far-away shouts, but then continues.

HODGES (CONT'D)
And write this: I am going to make an entrance now into the lowest region.

He is struck with fear. He takes a gulp from a brandy-bottle. Steadies his hand. The knife comes down.

INT. FEENY'S ATTIC NIGHT.

FEENY is with EAGLE's other followers, all pursuing their vengeful devotions loudly. The door opens and DAN runs in.

DAN
Murder! Alderman Poyntz murdered a woman!

FEENY
The Alderman!

The prayers die away as the crowd turns to listen.

FOLLOWER 1
That's a serious charge there, boy.

FOLLOWER 2

You must be mistaken, lad, the
Alderman's no murderer.

DAN

I saw it! I saw it happen with these
eyes!

FEENY

He saw it!

DAN

Like a lunatic, he was, straight out
of Bedlam, he pushed them and they
fell and one of 'em's dead! Murder!

FEENY

Did he invoke Satan as he done it?

DAN

I'm certain he did.

The crowd start to murmur amongst themselves.

FEENY

He drinks, he fornicates and he
commits murder - his true nature is
revealed as his power over us
dissolves - the Alderman brought the
plague and now he flees as it flees!

The DEVOTEES start to cry out. EAGLE'S eyes roll back in his
head as he shrieks:

EAGLE

The number of the Beast is 666! And
it is the number of a man!

DAN

Alderman Poyntz - his shop's number
six ain't it?

FEENY'S eyes light up as he grasps DAN's arm

FEENY

You speak the truth! His is the
number of the Beast! It was under our
noses all this time!

In the rising excitement, and perhaps to return the attention to
himself, SOLOMON EAGLE begins to speak in tongues. Snatching
him up by the elbow, FEENY pushes EAGLE out of the door followed
by the DEVOTEES.

FEENY (CONT'D)

He speaketh in tongues! God speaks to
us through the Blessed Prophet and
leadeth us the way! Take us to he
that bears the number of the beast!

The crowd, its mood turning very ugly, streams out of the door
as the sibilant sound of the word 'six' grows within it.

INT. BAKE-SHOP. NIGHT.

RATSEY is woken by the noise coming from the street.

RATSEY

Bloody hell. It's worse than the Pye
in here.

He cocks an ear and, frowning, rises, jams his hat on and exits
into the street.

EXT. HODGES'S GARDEN. NIGHT.

HODGES

I see a thin liquid, variously
coloured, yellow, greenish, brown and
purple. (Fingering it all). The small
guts are much distended and contain -
one moment - and contain a great
quantity of foul-smelling dross. Now
I am going to divide the vena porta,
spelled V-E-N-A P-O-R-T-A, and arteria
coeliaca spelled A-R-T-E-R-I-A C-O-E-L-
I-A-C-A. I find no rubified juice but
a firmly congealed substance of a very
dark colour.

HODGES pauses to cock an ear. In the Alley there is a
disturbance, a confused shouting of men and women.

HODGES (CONT'D)

How do you bear up, my dear?

BETTY

You may proceed, Doctor.

HODGES

Now for the Parenchyma of the liver.
P-A-R-E-

EXT. PYE TAVERN. NIGHT.

RATSEY is watching as the horde of TRUE BELIEVERS issues from the Pye, some with lanterns, some armed with dismantled chairs and tables. Leading the swarm is FEENY, with SOLOMON EAGLE, who is frothing at the mouth and spouting nonsense.

The mob screams for blood. At last they have someone to punish for their suffering. FEENY turns EAGLE in the direction of Harry's shop. EAGLE pauses, rolls his eyes, then rushes down the Alley towards it.

FEENY

I knew it! I knew it!

The inspired mob streams down the Alley behind FEENY and EAGLE. FEENY grabs EAGLE as they come abreast of Harry's shop and turns him towards the entrance.

FEENY (CONT'D)

You see? You see the number?

FEENY holds the torch up to the numeral 6. The crowd howls. EAGLE snorts, spouts more nonsense, and points at the shop. The DEVOTEES babble about the significance of the number in the Book of Revelations.

FEENY (CONT'D)

Yes! Yes!

MAN

But where is he? Where's the Alderman?

DAN

This way, he went this way!

Dan draws the crowd to the alley Harry escaped down earlier. As they run off, we notice Ratsey who has been observing from a doorway. The noise grows less and Ratsey is about to emerge when he hears the sound of a sliding bolt. He draws back, and sees the white face of SAM KILLIGREW emerge, look about him, and then walk, with a curiously rusty gait, towards a different alley. RATSEY thinks for a moment and then decides to follow SAM.

EXT. ALLEY. NIGHT.

The noise of the mob, the lanterns, torches and sticks, make for a Breughellesque picture as they bay for HARRY's blood.

EXT. BLANCHE'S GRAVE. NIGHT.

HARRY lies huddled by a little grave in a piece of wasteland that serves as a pets graveyard. The noise of the mob is clearly to be heard, and its intent clearer still, but HARRY seems unable to move. The patter of feet makes him start, until he sees SAM approaching, sorely winded.

SAM V/O

Harry. I thought I would find you here - get away. They're after you. They've murder in their hearts, Harry, you must run.

HARRY

Why?

SAM

God, Harry, get up.

HARRY

Go away, Sam.

SAM looks about the pets graveyard. He starts to cry, and slumps to his knees.

SAM V/O

Dickie - oh God, Dickie. What have I done?

HARRY stares at SAM compassionlessly.

HARRY

What have you done?

SAM

I shut him out. I shut him out.

HARRY

(listless)

It hardly matters, but you're a coward.

SAM

Oh God, Harry. Forgive me. Forgive me, at least. Dickie can't. Please, Harry, help me, please.

HARRY ignores him.

SAM (CONT'D)

Jem's gone, hasn't she? I saw.

HARRY
Good riddance.

SAM
I suppose everyone's guilty compared to you. Harry. The high-minded Alderman. Well, you've killed someone now, they say, so now you can join us mortals in the mud.

HARRY just sits.

SAM (CONT'D)
You just don't know what you'll do - when things happen. You do your best - but you don't know, and no-one can help you, not any Alderman, or Mayor or priest - not even God can help you.

HARRY looks up, recognising the truth of this. SAM covers his face with his hands and lets out a howl of mental torture. Shocked, HARRY rises and takes him in his arms.

HARRY
Stop Sam, stop. I do forgive you, I do.

They kneel in the mud for a moment in silence. At this moment the noise of the mob seems to augment, as though it is getting closer.

SAM
You've got to run. Get away from here before they string you up - I heard Feeny, he's determined. I'll help you get through the gate, then go up North to my cousin in Northumberland - he's a tailor, he'll find you work. Quickly, Harry.

SAM, as he speaks, tries to haul HARRY up, but weeks of captivity and anguish have rendered him almost as feeble. Staggering, they head off, away from the sound of the mob.

EXT. HODGES'S GARDEN. NIGHT.

A fleeting shot of the strange scene, MAG FEENY's entrails flowing about the Doctor, as he cuts and dictates.

EXT. ALLEYS. NIGHT.

The mob surges, hate and rage on all the flickering faces.

EXT. ALLEYS. NIGHT.

SAM and HARRY dodge and stumble, trying to keep away from the mob which seems to be all around them.

EXT. HODGES GARDEN. NIGHT.

Betty's pen flies across the paper.

EXT. ST. BARNABAS GATE. NIGHT.

HARRY and SAM approach the gate in the shadows. SAM is whispering urgently to HARRY.

SAM
Needle Street. You'll remember that,
anyway, won't you Harry? Say I sent
you.

The two CONSTABLES guarding the gate are standing away from it slightly, staring down the Alley, concerned about all the hullabaloo. HARRY, looking weak and uncertain, allows SAM to push him towards the gate. Then two things happen at once. The mob, led by DAN and FEENY, rounds the corner at a pace. Simultaneously, the CONSTABLES raise their lanterns to see more clearly and HARRY's white face is caught in their light.

FEENY
There he is!

The CONSTABLES turn towards HARRY and SAM.

SAM
Run, Harry!

One of the CONSTABLES easily catches HARRY as he stumbles towards the gate.

CONSTABLE
No, no, no you don't.

SAM runs to shield HARRY from the mob, who approach threateningly.

CONSTABLE 2
What's all this then? Now, now.

The CONSTABLES snatch up their halberds, looking frightened. FEENY yells out to the CONSTABLES.

FEENY
We've no quarrel with you, Constable.
Just let us have the Alderman.

CONSTABLE
Why? What's he done?

DAN
Committed murder!

FEENY
He brought the plague amongst us!

The CONSTABLE lets go of HARRY like a hot potato.

FEENY (CONT'D)
And he shall pay!

The mob bays.

FEENY (CONT'D)
Out of the way, Killigrew, else we'll
have you too!

SAM is terrified. HARRY sees it.

HARRY
(quietly)
Go, Sam. Sam, go.

SAM, struggling with his fear, seems to be in a battle for his very soul.

HARRY (CONT'D)
I'll run for it, Sam. Go home. Think
of Nan and Sal.

SAM hesitates and then bolts. The crowd surges forward, and as the CONSTABLES lay about them, HARRY makes his escape.

EXT. ALLEY. NIGHT.

HARRY runs for his life. The mob and FEENY are hot on his heels. He runs blindly down a tiny alley, with low overhanging windows that meet, almost in the middle. At the end is a brick wall. Too high to climb. He turns. The entrance to the alley is lit up with torches and silhouettes. The air is rent with baying. He stands and squares his shoulders.

Sensing his prey, FEENY walks slowly towards him, then turns to the mob, yelling at the top of his lungs.

FEENY
The moment of vengeance is at hand!

At this precise moment, a big fist reaches for HARRY's collar and just as if he were being hanged, he is hauled upwards and out of sight. FEENY turns back. HARRY's gone.

FEENY (CONT'D)

Where - the devil's taken him! Taken his own!

The mad mob spills about in the tiny alley.

FEENY (CONT'D)

Back! Back! He'll not escape us!

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE. NIGHT.

Below the window-ledge lean HARRY and RATSEY on their hunkers. RATSEY massages his shoulder. They hear the mob at the back of the house. He pulls HARRY to his feet. HARRY's legs give way.

RATSEY

Too narrow a squeak for you was it?

HARRY groans.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Well, we ain't out of the woods yet mate.

They hear the mob at the door of the house. RATSEY pulls HARRY out of the window, and they scarper onto the roof.

The mob spill about the house and then out into the street again. SOLOMON EAGLE drops to the ground, exhausted. FEENY tramples over him, as do most of the mob. SAM is nowhere to be seen.

EXT. BETTY'S GARDEN. NIGHT.

It's later, now, and quiet. HARRY stands by the pump as RATSEY brings a horse in around the side.

RATSEY

This the one?

HARRY

That's she.

RATSEY slings a saddle onto the horse and starts to tighten it.

RATSEY

I'm glad I found you.

HARRY

Why?

RATSEY

(shrugs)

You saved me from the noose once, if you recalls. We're square now.

HARRY

I've killed someone.

RATSEY starts to bridle the horse quickly.

RATSEY

So have I mate. When I was working the road. Not a-purpose. But they was after me, see, and I swapped hats with this fella that came along. They took him for me and shot him. In the back, too, cowards. Didn't sit well with me, I can tell you. Anyhows, if I can live with it, so can you.

He slings a saddle-bag over the horse's rump and manhandles HARRY on.

HARRY

You're a good man. Thank you.

RATSEY

Where will you go?

HARRY

(remembering))

Needle Street...

RATSEY

That's right - you make a new start.

He smacks the horse's rump and HARRY canters off into the night. RATSEY sighs in a satisfied sort of way as though he's sorted something out for himself.

Suddenly he's lit up from the door. It's BETTY with her lantern, returned from her labours with HODGES.

BETTY

(whispering)

Was that Harry?

RATSEY

They was after him.

BETTY

You've saved him, then.

RATSEY

From them, anyhow.

RATSEY walks up to her. He can't quite read her face, it's in shadow. He takes the hand holding the lantern and holds it up so he can see better. She smiles at him. He examines her with great interest for a second before leaning in to kiss her. Just before this moment of truth, however, a stone hits the front door and the noise of the crowd milling about in front of Betty's shop interrupts.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

Oh not again.

He strides through the bake-shop to the door.

BETTY

No! Come back here.

EXT. BAKE-SHOP. NIGHT.

FEENY and his mob haven't given up, although it's the hard-core group that remain, some others having stayed with the unfortunate EAGLE. FEENY is yelling at the closed, now dented, door.

FEENY

We knows you've got him in there. You was seen with his horse. Bring him on out and there won't be no trouble for you.

FEENY comes growling forward, his mates behind him. Suddenly, RATSEY comes out on a-roar, carrying a shovel of live coals which he swings wildly about his head, scattering the mobsters, and then crowning FEENY who drops like a stone. RATSEY pursues the rest, waving his shovel above his head and screaming.

RATSEY

Come on then! One at a time or all at once! I'll tear your ears off! I'll break you, you pox-ridden weevils! Whoreson, snivelling, belly-up bastards!

He turns back to the shop, yelling further colourful insults and enjoying himself hugely. Then he sees BETTY at the door and changes his tune.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
 Go on home now. Can't you see there's
 a decent folks a-trying to rest here?

And back he goes into the shop.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
 Where was we?

He approaches BETTY, who picks up her skirts and flees.

RATSEY (CONT'D)
 What?

He sits despondently on a flour-sack, pondering the ways of women - well, of this woman.

RATSEY (CONT'D) (cont'd)
 Bloody hell. What's a man have to do
 to get a shag around here?

There being no answer to this tender query, RATSEY lies down, casts around for his hat and then remembers something. Smiling, he closes his eyes to rest.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE. DAY.

It's a beautiful autumn day. HARRY leans exhaustedly on his exhausted horse. He slides off, and thinks to check in the saddle-bag. In one pocket is a loaf of bread, a stone bottle of water and a piece of meat.

In the other is RATSEY's stinking hat. Regarding it with a bemused frown, HARRY shrugs and puts it on. It fits him well.

EXT. BELFRY. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

The wooden figure of Time takes a turn outside. The wind swirls reddening leaves around the belfry. It's clearly autumn.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

A number of shops have been re-opened and they do not lack for CUSTOMERS. A few of the itinerant FOOD-VENDORS are hawking their wares. Here and there, OWNERS are removing the planks with which they boarded up their doors and windows before fleeing.

INT. BAKE-SHOP. DAY.

A hunk of dough gets plopped on the table. RATSEY, combed, clean-shaven and wearing one of JASPER's aprons, kneads it expertly. BETTY watches him.

BETTY

Ready?

RATSEY closes his eyes in concentration.

RATSEY

Ready.

BETTY

What grains do we use to make bread?

RATSEY

Wheat, rye, barley, millet, oats and -
and maize.

BETTY

How much barley would you use to make
a raised loaf making one pound?

RATSEY

I'd use - I wouldn't use none. Barley
don't raise. It ain't right, trying
to trick me.

BETTY

Oh the Guild will ask you harder
questions than that before they accept
you as a 'prentice.

She watches him.

BETTY (CONT'D)

You do that well.

RATSEY

I like doing it. It eases me.

BETTY

What makes the soft crumb?

RATSEY

The fat.

BETTY

A customer buys a loaf of bread and
forgets his change as he walks out.
What do you do?

There's quite a long pause.

BETTY (CONT'D)

Well?

RATSEY
I'm thinking.

BETTY
You run out after him with it.
There's nothing to think about.

RATSEY
There is for me.

BETTY
Name the Roman king who set up the
first baker's school.

RATSEY
Trojan?

BETTY
Trajan, Trajan.

RATSEY
Damn, I can't never remember.

BETTY
That'll do - set it aside and I'll
cover it to rise.

RATSEY stands back, breathing hard. He moves his shoulder which is still painful. BETTY comes to him, all commonsense and strength.

BETTY (CONT'D)
Here, I'll rub it. All that
kneading's stiffened you -

RATSEY looks at her, the devil in his eyes.

RATSEY
You never said a truer word missus.

She opens her mouth to scold him, but he stops it with a kiss which she can't help but return. He lifts her up and WHAM, down she goes onto the table.

EXT. BAKE-SHOP. DAY.

A cloud of flour puffs out of the window. There's a loud shriek from BETTY and a roar of delight from RATSEY. A lady CUSTOMER stops and looks in the window. We hear giggles from within as the CUSTOMER's hand flies to her mouth and she runs off to tell a FRIEND across the street about what's going on in the baker's shop.

They're coming back to take a closer look when another, larger puff of flour whooshes out of the window, making them choke. Suddenly we hear DR HODGES'S voice, loud in the Alley.

HODGES V/0

Betty! Betty Buckworth, where are you?

Covered in flour and struggling with her undergarments, BETTY appears at the door of the bake-shop. Her laughing face metamorphoses to horror and she lets out an involuntary scream. RATSEY appears next to her, naked from the waist up.

BETTY

My God, he's wearing his shroud.

HODGES stands in the street, barefoot and naked but for his shroud. Clutched under his arm is a manuscript. He would appear comical but for the tokens that pepper his face and neck. He is clearly on the very brink of death. Hardened though they are, PASSERSBY and INHABITANTS from the Alley shrink from him.

BETTY (CONT'D)

I'm here, Doctor.

HODGES

I remind you of your promise. The copies of my report are in my bedroom.

BETTY

For the love of God, Doctor, go in and lie down and let us take care of you.

HODGES

No. I'll pass the sickness to no-one else. The reports, Betty. One to my dear mother, one to Oxford, one to Cambridge, one to the Medical faculty at the school in Salerno. I've written it all down, and left money for the posting. Can you hear me?

BETTY

I hear you, Doctor. I promise.

She chokes on her tears and RATSEY draws her to him.

HODGES

That's all then and goodbye to you.

He looks blindly about.

HODGES (CONT'D)

Are there any University men within hearing? If there are, sing with me, my brothers. Sing with me for the last time.

Still clutching the manuscript and staggering toward and through St. Barnabas Gate, HODGES lifts a surprisingly true, strong voice in song. Past him, traffic heads back into the City. From afar we can see BETTY crying into RATSEY'S shoulder.

EXT. OPEN FIELD. DAY.

HODGES walks towards the dead pits. BEARERS and BURIERS, still at their work, afford him brief, incurious glances. HODGES sinks to his knees at the edge of one of the pits as his voice fails him and he topples forward. A BURIER hurrying past, almost without pausing, puts a foot against the body and sends it rolling out of sight. Field-birds rise from the pit, screeching protest, and then settle back to resume eating.

EXT. TOWN STREET. DAY.

A desolate, dusty figure on horseback rides slowly up the main street of an unfamiliar town. It is HARRY, still wearing RATSEY'S tattered hat. It's cold, and the bundled-up TOWNSPEOPLE eye this stranger with unease. Suddenly, something catches his eye. It is the window of a baker's shop and displayed within is a celebration cake of the type he served at his feast for the Lord Mayor. HARRY slowly reins in as he stares intently at the cake. He smiles faintly to himself.

EXT. HARROW ALLEY. DAY.

Snow flutters down upon the crowded Alley. Shops are open and full of CUSTOMERS. Most of the abandoned houses are re-occupied. VENDORS, 'PRENTICES and INHABITANTS throng and jostle. Street-cries are heard on each corner as before. Streaming back into the City are the elaborate coaches of courtiers, filled with smiling, singing nobility.

Watching the nobles with keen and merry eyes is an unfamiliar horseman with a shrewd and travel-worn look to him. He is moving towards the gate.

Suddenly his eyes open in an expression of total amazement, and he pulls up his horse. We follow his gaze onto RATSEY, who's sweeping before the bake-shop in his apron, a pipe in his mouth.

CAPTAIN BAINES

Captain. Captain. Captain.
Montressor.

RATSEY looks about to see who's being addressed and then remembers that it used to be his own nom de rue.

RATSEY

Captain Baines. What a fine surprise.
How are you mate?

CAPTAIN BAINES

What the hell are you doing with a broom? Never mind, come across the way and let's have a drink.

RATSEY

Can't mate, thank you just the same.
The wife's shopping and I has to tend to customers.

CAPTAIN BAINES

Customers? Wife? What sort of dodge is that?

RATSEY

Well, it's like this -

CAPTAIN BAINES

It don't matter, because I has something I knows will interest you much more. (Lowering his voice).
We're going to work together again, mate. I've already made arrangements with the Brotherhood, and the finest stretch of road you could hope for is ours - Twombly Hill, no less. I was on my way to visit Captain Fortescue, but who needs him now that I've found you?

RATSEY

Ah, thanks mate. There's no-one I'd rather go on the pad with than you, but I'm done with all that.

BAINES blinks - then laughs.

CAPTAIN BAINES

For a moment there, you almost took me in.

RATSEY

God's truth. I'm a baker now and it suits me.

CAPTAIN BAINES

Well I'll be damned. Captain Montessor. A baker. What the hell will you get out of that?

RATSEY

Oh I don't know. Hard to explain.

CAPTAIN BAINES

Try me.

RATSEY

Well - Well, this woman comes into the shop this morning with her little girl, she couldn't've been more 'n two. And I says to her "that's a pretty dress you're wearing darling". So she puts both hands on the hem and shows off the dress by lifting it over her head so's I could see her belly-button.

RATSEY's laughing.

CAPTAIN BAINES

Yes? And?

RATSEY

That's it. It made me laugh, that's all.

BAINES looks at him a long moment.

CAPTAIN BAINES

What a hairy-arsed man you once was. And what a dull one you now is.

RATSEY

I knows it.

CAPTAIN BAINES

Goodbye then, Captain.

RATSEY

Captain, goodbye.

They shake hands. BAINES rides off with an expression of utter bemusement. RATSEY watches him a moment and then laughs again.

RATSEY (CONT'D)

That's a pretty dress you're wearing my darling.

He mimes the little girl lifting her frock and, hooting with mirth, resumes sweeping.

EXT. GARDEN. DAY.

CLOSE on two pudgy little hands clutching a finger. JEM stands up, and away from the baby. It's a frosty day and the snow is thick upon the ground. She looks tired and sad. She turns to look at the sky, and notices something.

Above her, high on the hillside, a horseman sits. You can make almost nothing out, except the ragged broken feather atop his head which is etched very clearly upon the white horizon. JEM shields her eyes against the glare to look. The horseman starts down the hill towards her.

END