

A Shopkeeper's Lot - The story
of Martha Brown

by

Rosita Clarke

*Based on the true story of Martha
Brown: The last woman to be hanged in
Dorset 1856*

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FADE IN:

EXT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/THE YARD - DAY

The Yard is rough dry earth with wooden fencing in need of repair. Farm implements are strewn around. Hens peck at the ground.

MARTHA, 40, long black curly hair, beautiful for her age, is standing beside a chicken coop holding a basket of eggs. She wears black clothes.

SUPERIMPOSE: BLACKMANSTON FARM DORSET 1852

Martha is watching the comings and goings from a cottage a few yards distant from the old stone farm house. She is totally fascinated, smiling, completely engrossed.

EXT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/DAIRYMAN'S COTTAGE - SAME

A cart laden with furniture and personal belongings is parked on the dirt track outside the cottage with its door open.

JOHN BROWN, 21, tall, well built, muscular but slim young man with shoulder length dark hair is unfastening straps from the loaded furniture.

John lifts a table on his back and carries it inside the cottage.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/KITCHEN - DAY

The kitchen is large with basic well worn wooden furniture, a flagstone floor and two windows.

Martha wearing a grubby white apron over her black skirt is scrubbing potatoes at a large white sink with a single tap. A window over the sink overlooks the yard. She is staring at JOHN BROWN. She is hot, looks tired, hair a little dishevelled.

The basket of eggs lies on the large wooden table. JACOB SYMES, 42, robust looking, weather worn, takes them from the basket and puts them in a dresser cupboard.

MARTHA

Who's the good looking young man?

JACOB

Ah you think him good looking do you Martha? Well that's the new dairyman's eldest, John.

MARTHA

Is it?

JACOB

I wondered why them eggs took a long time coming. Come across with me now then and we'll welcome them.

MARTHA

Oh not now, Mr. Symes, I mean look at me?

JACOB

You look as lovely as you always do Martha. Come on.

Martha takes off her apron, smooths her skirt and adjusts her hair.

INT. DAIRYMAN'S COTTAGE/PARLOUR - DAY

The parlour is simply and rustically furnished. Crates and trunks lie around.

ROBERT BROWN ,42, is pouring milk from a large churn into a small jug standing on the table.

CHRISTIANA, 19, and BESS, 10, are unpacking linen from a wooden crate.

FRANCIS BROWN, 41, a large woman with a face which holds a permanently cross expression, is putting some crockery in a cupboard under the stone sink.

MARTHA looking rather awkward and JACOB stand by the table facing Robert.

ROBERT

For our own use Mr. Symes as you said we'd be entitled.

JACOB

Of course Robert. I'll take the churn back to the farm, save your feet. I trust you're settling in well.

Bess leaves her task and runs to Robert who puts an arm around her.

ROBERT

Yes thank you Sir. There's our Christiana and this is Bess, the baby.

MARTHA

I didn't know you had two daughters Mr Brown, I remember Christiana but not --

At that moment JOHN comes through the door carrying a huge trunk.

ROBERT

You do? Then you will remember John then. I'm afraid we're leaving him to do all the work, still no matter he has a broad set of shoulders on him.

MARTHA

(mesmerized by John)

So I see. I had not realized the children were so grown up. You won't remember me John?

JOHN

(smiling)

No.

MARTHA

I used to play with you when you were a little boy... and your sister of course.

Francis Brown all the while has been scrutinizing Martha, Francis notices John's flirtatious smile aimed at Martha.

FRANCIS

I didn't hear your name.

MARTHA

Martha, Martha Bearn, house keeper.

JACOB

Young John has been taken on as the new shepherd. It's nice to have you here, all of you.

MARTHA

(eyes fixed on John)

Yes it is.

(eyes turning quickly to Francis)

Yes it really is. I will come back and see you later Mrs Brown, see if you have everything you need.

Francis merely nods.

EXT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/FIELD - DAY

There is a flock of sheep grazing in the sunshine.

MARTHA walks between the sheep carrying a basket of bread and ale.

JOHN, bare chested and wearing a cap, lies face to the sky asleep.

Martha approaches John. She leans over John's upper body to get his attention, he is aware of the sudden dark shadow, his huge brown eyes open and Martha stands up straight.

JOHN

Well look at thee, Martha Bears
... and I see one servant to
another brings us a basket.

MARTHA

Barely a week gone and you are just
too familiar John Brown.

JOHN

And you are just too beautiful
Martha, yet you don't know it.

MARTHA

I didn't expect to find you idle.
'Tis a hard life I know being a
shepherd what with all the chores
to see to as well. And those sheep,
they must be such hard work for
you.

JOHN

Stay a while Martha, I've naught
but them for company and I know you
do often look at me in you know ...
That way.

MARTHA

And what way be that John?

JOHN

I've seen you, black eyes fixed on
me, when you think I be not
looking.

MARTHA

'Tis your vanity to think such a
thing.

JOHN

You're a very fine woman but one
whom I think might be in need of
some loving male company.

John lifts Martha's skirt with one of his legs and strokes one of her legs with his.

MARTHA

John Brown, you be young enough to
be my own child.

She puts down the basket, settles next to John, he sits up, takes off his cap, his long hair falls over his shoulders.

JOHN

I would have some of that ale now?

Martha hands the jug of ale to John.

MARTHA

To cool him down?

JOHN

And some bread.

MARTHA

To feed him up.

JOHN

But later ...Come here you.

JOHN kisses her. Martha comes alive as if she were dead these past years. They make love.

Afterwards JOHN and MARTHA lying staring at the sky.

FRANCIS (O.S)

(shrieking)

John! Where you be John? John!

JOHN

Damn it, it's mother.

MARTHA

Do you think she saw us?

FRANCIS (O.S)

John! You be needed. Mr Symes be looking for you. John.

JOHN

No she couldn't have but you go. I'll head mother off, keep her occupied 'til you get back to the farm. Can I come tonight Martha?

MARTHA

I don't know John it ain't right.

JOHN

Tonight then.

Martha hurries back to the farm.

FRANCIS (O.S)

John! You hiding again? John!

JOHN
Hold your horses, I'm on my way.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/MARTHA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

A chair is wedged against the door. There is a small single bed, chest of drawers and bedside cabinet on which is a flickering candle.

MARTHA is counting her savings. The door RATTLES the chair. Martha watches it spellbound. The door handle turns. She waits. She stuffs a wad of notes back in a tin and puts it under her mattress.

Martha opens the door.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARMHOUSE/STAIRCASE - SAME

JOHN is retreating down the stairs. MARTHA puts a finger to her lips, hushes him and beckons him back and inside.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/MARTHA'S BEDROOM - SAME

MARTHA
Did anyone see you?

John looks questioningly at the chair.

MARTHA (CONT'D)
This is madness John.

Grabbing Martha passionately. He pulls her on the bed. They make love.

JOHN
Should I finish outside Martha?

MARTHA
There's no need, I'm too old now to have a child.

JOHN
Thank you ... I love thee Martha Brown

They collapse in a tender embrace.

JOHN (CONT'D)
Tell me, how old are you?

MARTHA
Nearly as old as your mother.

JOHN

Well it matters not. I was taken
aback the first time I saw you.
Couldn't resist you.

MARTHA

I remembered you, you know.

JOHN

I know.

MARTHA

Yes as a small dark haired rather
impish little boy always into
mischief. It was such a surprise
when I saw you.

JOHN

Still dark and impish my love but
not so small hey?

MARTHA

You'd better go.

JOHN

Why so cautious?

MARTHA

I cannot risk Jacob's wrath.

JOHN

Why so?

MARTHA

Jacob took me on. He has been so
good to me. I was a poor miserable
widow then. Lost everything,
everyone. But I made something of
my self since. I thought.. So you
must be careful.

JOHN

Don't worry so. As I was coming
past the old man's room tonight I
heard him snoring, dead to the
world he was.

MARTHA

Old Man? Jacob is almost the same
age as me John.

JOHN

Ah but I much prefer your looks.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/KITCHEN - DAY

MARTHA looks tired as she prepares vegetables at the sink. JACOB and JOSIAH SYMES, 38, are eating their breakfast.

JACOB

You taking enough care of yourself Martha? You look tired.

MARTHA

Yes, I think so.

JACOB

I will ask Francis if she could help you a little, now she has settled in.

MARTHA

Thank you.

JACOB

You know, ever since you came to the farm all those years ago you worked like you were doing some form of penance.

JOSIAH

Aye and as poor as a church mouse then. Been through such a lot though, hadn't you Martha?

Martha stops peeling, turns towards the table, raises her knife, looks at Josiah angrily. Then swiftly as if remembering lowers the knife.

MARTHA

What would you know Josiah Symes?

JOSIAH

Ann said -

MARTHA

You have a nerve to mention my sister's name, taking up with her in the way you did, taking her away from us.

JACOB

Ann was a good worker if I remember, like yourself Martha? 'Twas a pity she left.

MARTHA

She deserved better.

JOSIAH

Never understood why she left me though.

JACOB

Aye, took off in a right hurry,
shame that was.

MARTHA

Because you didn't do right by her
Josiah.

JOSIAH

Oh and you did? You saw yourself
all right marrying that old man
with the farm, what was his name,
Bernard, that's it.

MARTHA

And what in God's name would you
know about that Josiah Symes.

JOSIAH

Feathering your own nest... funny
what life throws at you isn't it?

MARTHA

(thoughtfully)

I never treated Bernard well, I
admit that.

JACOB

Leave her be Josiah.

MARTHA

'Tis so though. I should never have
let him go that day, we were just
getting back on our feet, after ..

INT. LONGS FARM/ROOM ABOVE COW SHED - DAY - (FLASHBACK)

The room is divided by a sacking curtain. On one side BERNARD
(48) lies sick in bed coughing incessantly.

MARTHA, 28, stands by his bed.

BERNARD

I will have to leave the accounts
today my dearest.

MARTHA

I should never have driven Eliza
away we could have done with her
help now.

BERNARD

Eliza would have driven anyone mad.

MARTHA

Ann and Jack have been good to us
though, haven't they?

BERNARD

Yes. But they won't want us here
once their baby comes.

MARTHA

Don't you worry about that now
Bernard.

ANN RECORD, 32, pregnant, comes through a gap in the curtain.

ANN

I have a letter for you Bernard.

BERNARD

A letter?

MARTHA

(excited)

A letter!

Ann gives Bernard the envelope. He opens it.

BERNARD

It's from Sarah, my sister,
it's about Eliza.

MARTHA

(excitement gone)

Oh, not good news then.

ANN

What does she say that needs a
letter?

BERNARD

Eliza's left, Martha, gone to
London. London?

MARTHA

London?

ANN

Why? When? Does she know anyone
there?

BERNARD

No. It says she went off in a cart
with Ezekiel.

MARTHA

Ezekiel?

BERNARD

He was taking her to the railway
station at Southampton.

MARTHA

Ezekiel? Southampton?

BERNARD
 (coughing)
 I must go after her Martha.

MARTHA
 No, no you cannot. You are not well
 enough, listen to you.

BERNARD
 I must. She is my daughter, my only
 child left. I must bring her back.

ANN
 You will never find her Bernard.
 London is too big, where on earth
 will you look?

BERNARD
 (getting out of bed)
 Everywhere. I must do this. I must
 find Eliza, the poor girl.

MARTHA
 Then I will go with you.

BERNARD
 No... If I do find her you will
 only frighten her off again like
 before. I am going to bring her
 home Martha.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/KITCHEN - DAY

JACOB and JOSIAH are drinking milk from tankards. Martha
 takes the knife to a potato. She has tears in her eyes.

MARTHA
 You're right, I was a nobody, no
 husband, no home, no...

JOSIAH
 Like I said.

JACOB
 Life certainly dealt you a cruel
 hand Martha.

MARTHA
 (recovering)
 Well, I don't think on it much now.

Jacob stands up and wipes his mouth with his shirt tail.

JACOB

Have you seen young John this morning?

Josiah looks up with an expression showing he knows about Martha and John.

MARTHA

No... No, why do you ask?

Jacob takes his plate and tankard to the sink and stands next to Martha.

JACOB

Because one can never find him when you want him. He is a lazy good for nothing.

MARTHA

Oh, I thought him quite a hard worker.

JACOB

He neglects his work, we have two cases of foot rot already this season. I could lose my flock.

MARTHA

It's just his inexperience I expect, he has much to learn.

JACOB

It's laziness.

Jacob takes a jacket off a hook and moves to the door.

JACOB (CONT'D)

Why do you defend him Martha?

MARTHA

I don't.... But perhaps you should speak to him about it.

JACOB

That I will or tell him to look for work elsewhere.

Jacob leaves. Josiah stands up and takes his plate and tankard to the sink. He stands very close to Martha who looks flushed, guilty.

JOSIAH

(whispering in her ear)

Wouldn't be because of John Brown would it?

MARTHA

'Tis none of your business, now go
and do some work.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/MARTHA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

MARTHA and JOHN lie in bed cuddled up to each other.

MARTHA

You should not fall asleep in the
fields John. Jacob is displeased
with you

JOHN

Well I'm displeased with him. I
just want to be gone from here?

MARTHA

No, I couldn't bear that, what
about me? What will I do?

JOHN

Come with me Martha. Marry me.

MARTHA

You don't mean it. I'm old, you
will tire of me, want children,
look for someone younger.

JOHN

Never. I will never tire of you, I
love you, please don't, don't doubt
me.

He kisses her passionately.

JOHN (CONT'D)

But there is one favour I ask.

MARTHA

What's that?

JOHN

Leave off your black dress. Why do
you wear black all the time?

MARTHA

For my husband ... My children.

JOHN

Please, for me, go into town and
buy something pretty and colourful.
You are too beautiful to be wearing
black. Then we will start a new
life together.

MARTHA

I'll think about it.

JOHN

It would please me very much my
love.

John gets out of bed, puts on his shirt and pants, kisses Martha and without a sound leaves the bedroom.

Martha gets out of bed and takes the little tin out from under the mattress. She opens the box pushes aside the money and takes out a crumpled letter.

She holds it for a while then opens it and reads.

MARTHA (V.O.)

I am sorry to have to tell you the sad news that your husband died from pneumonia in the work house two days ago. He was delirious and feverish An inmate to whom he spoke his last words wanted me to pass them on to you. He said to tell you that he was sorry and that he loved you and always had and missed the boys as much as you.

Martha holds the letter close, then puts it back in the tin and takes out a little money.

EXT. THE BULL INN - WAREHAM - DAY

MARTHA sits along side JOSIAH who is driving the wagon which pulls up by the river's edge outside the Inn.

JOSIAH

Unlike you to spend any money. I wager it's because of John Brown.

MARTHA

You are just jealous because I rebuked you all those years ago.

JOSIAH

Not anything of the sort. I was only too pleased to take up with your sister Ann, she liked it far more than you anyway.

MARTHA

How dare you.

Martha and Josiah get down off the wagon.

Josiah ties up the horse. Martha straightens her skirts.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Why didn't you marry Ann when you brought her to Blackmanston.

JOSIAH

We had no need to marry, we were happy and then one day she takes herself off like a frightened kitten.

MARTHA

You abandoned her Josiah.

JOSIAH

I did not. She ran off I tell you.

Josiah heads for the Inn entrance.

JOSIAH (CONT'D)

One hour then.

MARTHA

(calling after him)
She was with child.

JOSIAH

(slowly turning around)
... I swear I didn't know. You know I would have done right by her. The baby?

MARTHA

Stillborn.

JOSIAH

Where is she now?

MARTHA

With her husband Jack and they have a dear daughter too.

JOSIAH

It was not as you say Martha I tell you. I loved Ann. She didn't tell me.

Josiah hastily goes into the Inn. Martha walks off.

MONTAGE -

--JOSIAH and MARTHA are travelling back home. Martha carries a bundle of packages. Josiah is a little intoxicated.

--RICHARD DAMON, 20, nicely dressed, good looking, athletic, riding a stallion, passes the wagon recklessly. MARTHA looks curious

--MARTHA in her bedroom, unwraps her purchases. She takes out a pretty light blue patterned dress. She admires it, hangs it over the chair and tosses a pretty straw bonnet on to the bed.

--RICHARD DAMON rides into Blackmanston Farm and across the yard sending the chickens NOISILY in all directions.

EXT. DAIRYMAN'S COTTAGE/FRONT DOOR - DAY

RICHARD DAMON stands by his horse holding the reins. FRANCIS BROWN stands in the doorway.

RICHARD

No, still at Birdsmoorgate but I had some business in Wareham so I thought I would visit my favourite aunt.

FRANCIS

Charming as ever. John will be pleased to see you..

RICHARD

Where is he now?

FRANCIS

Out with the sheep. He feels isolated here, is getting restless.

RICHARD

(mounting his horse)
Where to?

FRANCES

(pointing)
You must stay a day or two? He would like that.

INT. THE BULL INN - WAREHAM - NIGHT

The Inn is full of LOCALS laughing, drinking.

Young WOMEN circulate among the drinkers carrying flagons of ale.

JOHN and RICHARD sit at a bench, tankards in their hands.

RICHARD

Come back to the Vale, you must be beside yourself with boredom, with them sheep an' all.

JOHN

I have one saving grace, otherwise, yes it would be unbearable.

RICHARD

Who is she?

JOHN

The housekeeper.

RICHARD

I think I saw her. Bit old for you isn't she? Quite a beauty though that I must admit. Are you? --

JOHN

As often as we can get away with.

RICHARD

I can see why?

JOHN

The Farmer doesn't like me and my mother doesn't like her.

RICHARD

All the same you need to plan for the future.

A serving woman stops by them and tops up their tankards. Richard puts an arm round her, she laughs and kisses him on the cheek.

JOHN

Your Susan would be jealous if she could see you now.

RICHARD

Susan is going to be my wife and though I love her, she don't own me.

EXT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/YARD - DAY

MARTHA meets JOHN coming across the yard.

MARTHA
You didn't come last night.

JOHN
No.

MARTHA
Or the night before. Have I
offended you?

JOHN
Of course not my love I've spent
time with my cousin that's all. I
haven't seen him for such a while.
Anyway he leaves tomorrow.

MARTHA
What do you do?

JOHN
Talk.

MARTHA
And drink more like.

JOHN
What if I do?

MARTHA
I miss you John, that's all.

JOHN
Come here you.

MARTHA
Someone will see.

JOHN
I'll come tonight.

INT. BLACKMANSTON FARM/KITCHEN - DAY

JOSIAH is at the table eating his breakfast. Recently cut
bread and a bread knife are to one side of the table top.

MARTHA comes into the kitchen tying her apron, flustered,
carrying a small pail of milk.

MARTHA
I'm sorry I'm a little behind this
morning, up late.

JOSIAH
And we all know why that is, so I
got my own breakfast.

MARTHA

Oh and what do we all know?

JOSIAH

I saw John coming out of your room
in the early hours.

MARTHA

Oh did you? You were snooping.

JOSIAH

No, I went to relieve myself that's
all and I saw him. But that be not
the only time I saw him.

Martha SLAPS the milk down on the table in front of Josiah.

MARTHA

Is it not?

Josiah, laughing, makes a fumbled pass at Martha who
instantly slaps him.

JOSIAH

Come on for old times sake?

MARTHA

You have no shame Josiah Symes.

JOSIAH

Nor you. I am certain Jacob being a
Christian and all that, would not
be pleased.

Martha begins cutting a slice of bread for herself.

MARTHA

Well if you tell then I shall tell
how you abandoned my sister with
child.

JOSIAH

But --

MARTHA

Then we will both be dismissed...
Anyway John and me are going to
wed.

JOSIAH

Impossible, why would John want to
marry a woman twice his age.

MARTHA

Because he loves me.

JOSIAH
More like for your money. That's
it, he's after your money

MARTHA
(furious)
Take that back Josiah Symes.

JOSIAH
I wager you have a bit saved after
all these years.

Martha in a rage, lifts the bread knife and threatens him.
She slams it back down thinking better of it, faces him and
slaps him again across the face.

JOSIAH (CONT'D)
My God Martha you never learn do
you? You would have thought the
years would have brought you wisdom
and control but no, you show your
true colours all right.

Josiah storms off red faced passing FRANCIS BROWN rushing in.

FRANCIS
How dare you! You shameless whore.

MARTHA
What?

FRANCIS
Child stealer. John told me this
morning you are going to marry. I
knew you were making eyes at him.

MARTHA
Well, I won't deny it.

FRANCIS
You know, he is only after your
money.

MARTHA
That is not true. He loves me.

Martha sits down, upset, distressed by her own lack of
control and Francis's attitude.

JOHN appears in the doorway unseen by Francis.

FRANCIS
He's that keen to get away from
here, he needs your money.

JOHN comes into the kitchen.

JOHN

Mother, I won't have you talking to Martha like that. And as for wanting her money that is an evil thing to say. I love her.

John comforts Martha. Francis leaving.

FRANCIS

And when it's gone he will leave you for someone his own age.

Martha falls into John's arms, upset.

JOHN

Don't take notice of mother. In no time now we will be gone. Richard says there's a little grocery shop for sale back in Birdsmoregate.

MARTHA

A shop. That sounds nice John.

INT. REGISTRY OFFICE - WAREHAM - DAY

Surrounding MARTHA and JOHN in the small room are THE REGISTRAR, 60 s, SARAH BROWN, 40 s, THOMAS BARNES, 20 s, and CHRISTIANA.

Martha dressed in her new blue dress and straw hat, dips a pen in the ink and signs '*Martha Bearns*' in the marriage register next to that of the signature of *John Brown*.

EXT. REGISTRY OFFICE - DAY

It is very lightly snowing.

MARTHA and JOHN, SARAH, THOMAS and CHRISTIANA who are now all wearing warm capes, shawls and coats emerge on to the street.

A horse and wagon with DRIVER is waiting nearby.

THREE TOWNSWOMEN standing nearby are watching.

JOHN

Thank you Sarah, Thomas for being our witnesses.

SARAH

I know there be many who disapprove John but you have our blessing.

THOMAS

Aye, 'tis a pity folks always judge.

MARTHA

It matters not Tom, we couldn't be happier.

JOHN

And dearest Christiana, we are so pleased you came.

CHRISTIANA

Mother forbade it but no matter. I hope you and my brother will be very happy.

MARTHA

Thank you, thank you everyone.

JOHN

I hope to make my wife very happy. Come Martha the wagon is waiting.

Christiana gives John and Martha a kiss. The couple climb aboard. The driver cracks his whip. John and Martha snuggle close to keep warm. The Townswomen join Sarah, Thomas and Christiana.

FIRST TOWNSWOMAN

They look happy enough, but why they be choosing this miserable time of year I don't know. They must be desperate to wed.

SECOND TOWNSWOMAN

Aye, and her being so much older than he. 'Tis a funny doing.

THIRD TOWNSWOMAN

They be like mother and son.

CHRISTIANA

There's nothing funny about it, my brother happens to love his wife and I have no reason to doubt it.

SARAH BROWN

Nor I.

THOMAS BARNES

He could make something of himself now perhaps.

CHRISTIANA

Aye, that shop could be a right blessing.

THOMAS BARNES

And to be sure she is a beauty.

FIRST TOWNSWOMAN

I for one wish them a fine and
happy long life together.

SARAH BROWN

Yes, Martha strikes me as a very
pleasant sensible and even tempered
woman. Good day to you all.

Sarah, Thomas and Christiana pull their hoods up and walk
away together.

THIRD TOWNSWOMAN

Well I reckon it will all turn
rotten in the end. There be not
much chance of them getting along
forever with him being no more than
a boy, 'tis not natural.

SECOND TOWNSWOMAN

We will see and time will tell as
they say.

FIRST TOWNSWOMAN

Aye, we will see.

The snow falls more heavily.

MONTAGE - THE FIRST SIX WEEKS AT BIRDSMOORGATE.

-- MARTHA dressed neatly with clean apron and JOHN work
together happily in their shop organizing the counter and
shelves. Arranging goods neatly. Adding price boards.

SUPERIMPOSE: BIRDSMOREGATE - DORSET

-- In their parlour, MARTHA hands some money to JOHN who
stuffs it in a pocket quickly after giving her a quick
kiss. He leaves hastily.

-- In front of the shop there are neatly piled up boxes of
vegetables. MARY DAVIS, 21, slim and pretty picks up a
potato examines its quality and places it back. She peers
into the shop through a tiny window pane.

-- In The Rose and Crown Inn several LOCALS are sat around on
benches, at tables drinking. MARY DAVIS sits with JOHN and

RICHARD DAMON at a small table. Richard looks content
John is flirting with Mary.

-- The shop bell CLANGS. SUSAN DAMON, 21, walks to the
counter. MARTHA filling a shelf greets Susan
affectionately. Susan helps with the packets. They are
laughing.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP - DAY

MARTHA standing behind the counter with a quizzical
expression stares at a pane in the shop window. The image in
the pane is that of MARY's face pressed up against it looking
in.

JOHN, putting some packets on a shelf, sees the face too and
smiles. He has his back to Martha. She doesn't see him smile.

MARTHA

I see that woman prying before
John. Shall I see what she wants?

JOHN

Oh, I know who that be.' Tis Mary
Davis.

MARTHA

Mary Davis?

JOHN

Aye, shop keeper too, from across
the road, I believe.

MARTHA

What old William's young wife? She
has a small boy too I believe.

The face disappears from the window pane. John turns around
to face Martha who is putting potatoes into a sack.

JOHN

She's all right, I've see her at
the inn.

MARTHA

She frequents The Rose and Crown?
That's not very fitting for a lady
shop keeper.

JOHN

Well once or twice only, just once.

MARTHA

She should concentrate more on her own shop then, like I do, than peering into ours.

JOHN

Maybe I'll go and --

MARTHA

No! It's no bother for me, just a nuisance really... John, will you deliver this to Mrs Staunton, she sent a boy.

JOHN

So why didn't he take them?

MARTHA

It was a very small boy, potatoes are heavy.

JOHN

All this fetching and carrying...

Martha puts her arms around John.

MARTHA

Don't grumble so ... John ... I have some good news.

JOHN

What's that then?

MARTHA

I am going to have a baby.

JOHN

What? How? I thought you told me you couldn't.

MARTHA

I thought I couldn't but I'm pretty sure. Are you not pleased?

JOHN

Yes, of course but do we have enough money left.

John breaks away and picks up the sack of potatoes.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I was going to ask if we could get a cart, make things easier for me but now if we are going to be parents...

MARTHA

The shop is not quite making enough to pay our way, yet.

JOHN

Well then with a cart it will. We will be able to deliver goods and so increase trade.

MARTHA

Perhaps we could just about afford a baby and a cart. But would you not need a horse too?

JOHN

(leaving with the sack)
I think I can get a horse very cheaply from George Fookes and possibly a cart too.

Martha watches him go, she smiles contentedly. John looks very pleased with himself. The bell CLANGS.

EXT. THE BROWNS' SHOP - DAY

JOHN shuts the door behind him, sack of potatoes in one arm.

He almost bumps into MARY who is peering through the shop window.

JOHN

Can I help you Mary?

MARY DAVIS

Oh I was just looking. You have such a good selection of stock.

JOHN

Aye.

MARY DAVIS

My shop is not doing so well since you came.

JOHN

You should try delivering. I'm going to get a horse and cart soon and offer delivery.

MARY DAVIS

Oh aye and how could I? My man is too old and my son too young.

JOHN

Well I might just be able to help you out there Mary, maybe deliver for you, work together.

MARY DAVIS
 (flirtatiously)
 Well that is most kind of you.

The shop door opens. The bell CLANGS, MARTHA appears annoyed, glares at Mary.

JOHN
 Mary, this is my wife Martha.

MARY DAVIS
 Nice to meet you Mam, oh didn't
 realize, thought you were his
 mother

Martha shrugs it off with a half smile.

MARY DAVIS (CONT'D)
 You have it nice, the shop. I have
 the one across there and John says
 he could help me with delivering
 when he gets his horse. Good day
 Mrs Brown, John.

MARTHA
 You didn't have to be quite so nice
 to her.

JOHN
 This is a small place and we are
 neighbours, we have to make an
 effort.

EXT. A FIELD - DAY

GEORGE FOOKES, 35, weathered look, stands by JOHN and a very flighty HORSE. George is holding the harness very tight to keep the horse still.

A rather battered but serviceable cart stands nearby.

GEORGE
 She just needs time to get used to
 a person.

JOHN
 I hope you be right George.

GEORGE
 Cheap for a fine one like this.

The horse viciously kicks out at John. George has to use all his strength to hold her back.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Trouble is she weren't trained proper but she'll be a good friend to you, I know it.

JOHN

Well thank you kindly, 'tis a bargain indeed and we should see things pick up a great deal with the shop now.

John hands George some money. George tucks the notes in his boot.

GEORGE

Is Mrs Brown keeping well?

JOHN

Bit crotchety with expecting baby and all but content all the same.

John and George walk towards the cart.

GEORGE

You can keep 'em in Mrs Samson's field, up road from yours, for a small rent she says.

JOHN

(laughing)

'T would have to be very small.

George and John struggle to hook the horse up to the cart. John gets on to the cart and flicks the reins to get the horse moving. George laughs as John battles to get control of the horse.

MONTAGE - THE NEXT SIX MONTHS AT BIRDSMOORGATE.

-- JOHN with the horse and cart filled with logs trots along relatively calmly. The horse suddenly stops, raises his head high, kicks out a back leg. John gains control and they trot off again.

-- MARTHA is struggling to carry a crate of vegetables across the shop floor. She puts a hand to her back, winces a little in pain.

-- MARY is sat up on the cart watching JOHN who is carrying a sack of potatoes on his back, walking up a cottage path.

- He turns to look at her. She blows him a kiss and laughs.
- MARTHA stands in front of the range. She lifts a heavy scuttle of coal and tips some into the burner. She looks noticeable pregnant.
- MARTHA is walking along struggling carrying a churn of milk. She passes TWO VILLAGE WOMEN who stand talking to each other. The women give disapproving looks to Martha who notices, lowers her head and walks on.
- JOHN, drunk is with GEORGE, RICHARD, MARY and OTHER LOCALS in The Rose and Crown Inn. They laugh and joke.
- MARTHA and JOHN are arguing in the parlour, which is dimly lit with candle light. John slaps Martha across the face.

INT. THE DAMONS' COTTAGE/PARLOUR - DAY

MARTHA sits opposite SUSAN DAMON at a small table. They are drinking tea.

MARTHA

How can I rest? The shop keeps me busy. And John has his precious horse and cart, he ain't 'round so much to help.

SUSAN

But you shouldn't be lifting and carrying so, could harm the baby.

MARTHA

Well if the goods don't get delivered the business suffers. Folks expect it now.

SUSAN

Do you want Richard to talk to John about helping out more. He might listen to his cousin.

MARTHA

Perhaps? No ...John is very touchy lately and I fear drinking rather too often. Spends more time at Rose and Crown than with me.

SUSAN

Oh Martha, you are a good woman and a good friend. I'll see if I can come around and help you tomorrow for a while.

MARTHA

Thank you.

SUSAN

'Tis all right.

MARTHA

Others, 'specially that Harriet Knight --

SUSAN

Who has the sharpest tongue --

MARTHA

Thinks it odd me being so much older than John but why they think me offish I don't know. I try really hard to be friendly.

SUSAN

They're jealous. And curious, 'specially since you start to sell them luxuries in the shop.

MARTHA

What the jam?

SUSAN

And the Honey. Luxuries to the likes of us here are for well to do folks to buy and us to make.

MARTHA

(downcast)

Oh Susan I just want it all to be so nice. I want me and John to make a respectable name for ourselves.

SUSAN

You will Martha, give it time.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP - DAY

MARTHA looking pale and tired is weighing up flour. HARRIET KNIGHT ,35, severe face, watches Martha critically.

MARTHA

Anything else Mrs Knight?

HARRIET

No that's all. I don't see your husband helping out much these days.

MARTHA

He's busy enough with his delivering.

MARTHA suddenly gasps in pain.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Ah! Oh dear, I think he be coming... 'Tis far too early.

HARRIET

You must get to your bed dear.

MARTHA

Yes, perhaps. Maybe I just need to lie down for a while.

HARRIET

I'll get your husband. I see his horse still be in the field so do you know where he might be?

MARTHA

Rose and Crown if he's not out with horse and cart. Thank you.

INT. THE ROSE AND CROWN INN - DAY

The bar is very peaceful and quiet with just a couple of CUSTOMERS.

JOHN is drinking with MARY. They are flirting with each other.

MRS. STAUNTON, mid 50 s, stands behind the bar, bored. MR. STAUNTON, mid 50 s, is struggling to connect up a beer barrel.

HARRIET marches purposefully through the door. Looks to the bar and then around the room.

HARRIET

Ah there you are! Mary Davis you should be looking out to your young son not leaving him with that old husband of yours and why ain't you helping the Landlord with that barrel John Brown, you can see he be struggling?

Mary nearly falls off her stool giggling.

JOHN

'Tis none of your business Mrs Knight. Mr Staunton don't want help, do you Man?

Mr Staunton shakes his head.

MRS STAUNTON

Ain't seen you here this time of day before, what will you be having Harriet?

HARRIET

I haven't come here to drink I be after you John. Your wife back home has shut up shop suddenly.

JOHN

Oh?

HARRIET

She don't feel well.

JOHN

She can look after herself.

MARY DAVIS

Go see if she's all right John, what with the baby an all.

JOHN

Thank you Mrs Knight for the information. Good day

Mrs Knight leaves

MR STAUNTON

(breathless)

There 'tis done. Will you be having another now John ?

John nods affirmatively. Mary and John continue to talk and laugh.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/BEDROOM - DAY

The small bedroom has one iron bedstead, a small chest and a wooden chair.

MARTHA falls in agony on to the bed, she takes off her skirt with effort, her white petticoats are stained with blood. Blood is seeping down the bed sheets and spilling on to the floor boards. Martha, sweating and MOANING looks exhausted, scared. She uses a sheet to stem the blood flow.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/BEDROOM - NIGHT

JOHN very unsteady on his feet comes through the door and knocks over the chair. MARTHA lying on the bed wakes.

JOHN
My God, this room looks like a
murder scene... What happened?

MARTHA
(faintly)
I lost our son John.

Martha turns to John with a look of loving expectation.

JOHN
This is disgusting Martha, makes me
feel sick. Have this damned mess
cleared up 'fore I return.

MARTHA
John?

John storms out, SLAMS the bedroom door behind him. Martha quietly weeping hears HEAVY STEPS on the stairs, the shop bell CLANGS, the door SLAMS shut. Then SILENCE.

EXT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/GARDEN - DAY

The garden has prepared beds of freshly dug soil. There are borders full of blooming daffodils. MARTHA, looking content slim and beautiful is picking the daffodils.

The sun shines brightly.

SUPERIMPOSE: SPRING 1855

Martha arranges the flowers in equal sized bunches. She takes great care and pride in this. She gathers a dozen or so bunches and goes inside.

EXT. THE BROWN'S SHOP - DAY

The shop bell CLANGS. MARTHA comes out through the door. She bends down, places the bunches in a pail of water. The bucket has 'penny a bunch' chalked on it.

ELIZA, 25, very thin, ill nourished, looking forlorn and carrying a small child, SETH, 2, comes up behind Martha who senses their presence and turns.

MARTHA
(standing up)
Oh my goodness, Eliza! It is Eliza,
isn't it?

ELIZA

I didn't think you would recognize me.

MARTHA

I nearly didn't. Good God Eliza. Come on, come in side you look weary. Both of you.

ELIZA

Wasn't sure if you would welcome me Martha.

MARTHA

Why ever not? When all said and done you are still family.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - DAY

Martha takes the kettle off the range and pours the water into a teapot standing neatly positioned with other crockery on the table. There is a tin of biscuits next to the teapot.

ELIZA sits at the table with SETH, who is grizzling, on her lap.

ELIZA

His name is Seth.

MARTHA

I don't suppose there is a father on the scene.

ELIZA

No.

MARTHA

What do you want of me Eliza?

ELIZA

Someone to look after Seth while I look for work.

MARTHA

You know I blame you for your father's death don't you?

ELIZA

Yes, I was told he came to look for me in London. I didn't ask him to.

MARTHA

He was so ill. You broke his heart. Come, you pour the tea, give me the boy.

ELIZA

I didn't know... I didn't stay with Ezekiel, he soon returned.

MARTHA

He had more sense. And what did you do?

ELIZA

I was a scullery maid for a while then I met ...

MARTHA

It is all right I do not wish to know.

(giving Seth a biscuit)

And now you expect me to help you.

Martha smiles lovingly at Seth who eagerly takes the biscuit and sucks at it. The shop door bell CLANGS.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Ah well no matter, we cannot change circumstances, let bygones be bygones. Are you hungry too?

ELIZA

Starving.

John comes in through the door, annoyed.

JOHN

And why would I be wanting to share my supper with a stranger?

MARTHA

John, this is Eliza, Bernard's daughter and Seth her little boy.

JOHN

What's she doing here?

MARTHA

She's down on her luck, needs somewhere to stay while she looks for work.

JOHN

We don't have room.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - DAY

ELIZA, MARTHA AND JOHN are eating supper in silence. John has a tankard of ale.

John scrutinizes Eliza with admiration. His mood is more congenial. He takes a swig of his ale.

MARTHA

Seth has settled to bed nicely. He must sense he is safe now.

ELIZA

Thank you Martha, I do appreciate it.

JOHN

What kind of work are you looking for?

ELIZA

Anything.

JOHN

Can you drive a horse and cart?

ELIZA

No, I don't think so.

JOHN

Then you can't do everything can you?

MARTHA

John, please. Why do you want her to drive a horse and cart anyway?

JOHN

So she can help me.

MARTHA

And how good would that look, you with a strange young woman by your side, folks would talk.

JOHN

I would say that she was your daughter.

MARTHA

Step daughter John and I was thinking she might help me in the shop.

JOHN

Perhaps, she'll have to pay her way somehow that's for sure and the child's.

ELIZA

Thank you, both.

John smiles at Eliza. Eliza smiles sweetly back. Martha notices, lowers her head.

EXT. THE ROSE AND CROWN INN/BACK YARD - DAY

The Yard is untidy and strewn with old barrels and sacks.

SUPERIMPOSE: AUTUMN 1955

MARTHA with SETH toddling on by her side, hands over a crate of vegetables to MRS STAUNTON.

MRS STAUNTON

A fine crop this year Martha.

MARTHA

I think so. I've been able to spend more time in the garden now Eliza helps in the shop.

MRS STAUNTON

I must say you look healthier these days. Must be the child brought back the spring in your step.

MARTHA

It is a pleasure to have a young one around and him being such a kindly and jolly child. He helped harvest these carrots, in his way.

MRS STAUNTON

Well I do say these past months you seem happier and your husband, he don't be spending so much on liquor these days either.

MARTHA

Yes I've noticed that. He likes Seth's company too. Same crate next week?

MRS STAUNTON

Aye, thank you Martha.

Martha and Seth cross the yard and meet SUSAN DAMON.

SUSAN

Martha, how are you? Hello Seth.

SETH

Hello Aunt Susan.

MARTHA

Yes well. Though I spend more time with the boy than his mother does.

(MORE)

MARTHA (CONT'D)

She seems more than content to work in the shop all the time.

SUSAN

Richard says that John is spending more time at home these days too.

MARTHA

Aye he do that. But I wished he helped me out in the shop before like he do with Eliza now.

SUSAN

He misses his drinking partner though.

MARTHA

What? Oh yes, I'll see if John will drop round catch Richard for a drink tonight.

SUSAN

He would like that. You know I be happy for you all.

MARTHA

Oh, Susan can I borrow a hatchet, mine be of no use at all for splitting coal, will be needing fire lit soon. Nights giving in.

SUSAN

I'll ask Richard to bring one round.

INT. THE ROSE AND CROWN - NIGHT

RICHARD and JOHN are drinking at the bar. MR. MRS. STAUNTON stand behind the bar.

Some LOCALS including GEORGE FOOKES sit at benches drinking, talking.

MARY DAVIS is sat at another bench with some YOUNG MEN, laughing and teasing.

MRS STAUNTON

Your Martha has grown some hearty vegetables this year John.

JOHN

She likes to busy herself and of course it do help the business no end.

MRS STAUNTON

Nice to see you John. We don't see you so often now.

RICHARD

More's the pity I say.

JOHN

I have much to do.

RICHARD

Oh by the way I'll bring round that hatchet some time John. Martha wants to borrow one she told our Susan.

JOHN

Did she? What she be wanting with a hatchet? Ah well 'tis her business. Don't Susan mind you keep company here all the time.

RICHARD

She pretends to mind. But what of it? I say. Any how, since when did you become the dutiful husband John.

John indicating with a nod for them to move away from the bar.

RICHARD (CONT'D)

'Tis not the John I used to know.

Sitting at a corner table.

JOHN

The reason I spend more time at home now is not because of Martha but because I like being withEliza.

RICHARD

Ah! I thought there must be something, but your step daughter?

JOHN

Not mine, Martha's.

RICHARD

Martha is good to you though.

JOHN

She gets too possessive that's why it's so convenient she has Seth, keeps her happy and out my hair.

RICHARD

I must admit a child for Susan is what she needs. Women can be so damned needy, always feeling they must --

JOHN

Aye.

RICHARD

Just be watchful John. Your Martha, good as she be, is known to have a ticklish disposition when riled.

JOHN

She be fiery all right, 'tis true.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP - DAY

MARTHA is packing groceries into a bag. She smiles protectively at SETH playing cup and ball close by.

HARRIET KNIGHT stands the other side of the counter watching Martha's every move closely.

MARTHA

Five shillings and sixpence please Harriet.

HARRIET

The cost these days. 'Tis a wonder anyone can live anymore... how are you keeping these days Martha?

MARTHA

I am well thank you. Will you take these now or shall I send Eliza around with them.

HARRIET

Where is Eliza right now then?

MARTHA

On an errand.

HARRIET

She is away a lot these days on errands, as you say.

MARTHA

Not so often, she helps a lot in the shop while I look out to Seth. What are you saying?

HARRIET

I don't want to speak out of turn my dear but I would keep a careful eye on that young lady.

MARTHA

What do you mean?

HARRIET

Well if it were me I would have thought twice before bringing a good looking young woman under the same roof as your husband, what with him being much younger than yourself.

MARTHA

Why? What have you heard?

HARRIET

I have said enough I just thought it a neighbourly thing to do to warn you that's all.

MARTHA

Warn me! What of? You're just an idle gossip Harriet.

HARRIET

It's not gossip my dear. I live next to the field where your husband keeps his horse remember. I see all the comings and goings.

MARTHA

You have seen Eliza with my John?

HARRIET

There, I have said enough but if I were you I would send her packing if you want to save your marriage and not end up with another mouth to feed. Good day Martha.

Harriet leaves looking very pleased with herself.

Martha is momentarily stunned. Flustered, she puts on her bonnet and shawl, scoops up Seth, hurries out, putting up the closed sign. The bell CLANGS.

EXT. A FIELD - DAY

JOHN AND ELIZA lay in the hay in front of a dilapidated shed with two hay forks hanging beside its entrance. John and Eliza share a flagon of cider. Laughing. Cuddling.

THE HORSE is grazing nearby, restless, kicking at the ground.

MARTHA struggling with the weight of SETH approaches the gate. Opening the gate makes a NOISE. Eliza sits up, hurriedly buttoning up her bodice.

JOHN

That bitch Mrs Knight has gone and told her. I said she would.

ELIZA

Say I just be helping you with a thorn stuck in horse's hoof.

They both quickly stand up adjusting their clothing. The Horse is startled, NEIGHS wildly. Martha almost throws Seth on the hay in front of John and Eliza.

MARTHA

What are you doing here Eliza? You should have been back hours ago.

ELIZA

I met John on my way back and he asked for help with the horse.

JOHN

Horse has a thorn.

MARTHA

Does it now! What's going on John? You have been with her, haven't you?

ELIZA

Martha?

JOHN

And what's it to do with you anyway woman?

MARTHA

How could you? You're a whore Eliza Bearns, always was, you killed your brother, your father, now you steal my man, you slut.

ELIZA

Oh and what use do you think John has then for a barren old woman like --

Martha flings herself violently at Eliza. Seth is crying. Martha grabs a hay fork and swings it towards Eliza's head but John grabs it and diverts its course just in time.

JOHN

Martha! What the hell are you doing?

Martha falls to her knees crying.

ELIZA

There's your vicious tongue and
foul temper once more.

MARTHA

You've been carrying on with my
step daughter under my very nose
and everyone in the village knows.

JOHN

It's gossip Martha just gossip.
Lies.

MARTHA

Go home Eliza, pack your things,
get out of our house, you can leave
Seth with me, he's as good as my
own anyway.

Martha picks up Seth who stops crying.

ELIZA

I will go Martha, but don't think I
don't love my child. I do and when
I am settled into work I will come
for him. I will.

JOHN

You go home too Martha. Take the
poor boy home.

ELIZA

Mark my words, you won't keep him
very much longer he has a roving
eye, that husband of yours.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR- NIGHT

MARTHA sits in front of the range. Her expression one of
rage.

Two meals set out on the table remain untouched.

JOHN comes through the door. He is drunk. She launches
herself at John in a furious temper. Hitting him with every
breath.

MARTHA

What should I have expected from a
man who has eyes for every skirt he
sees.

Martha throws a plate of food at John which misses and
CRASHES to the floor

MARTHA (CONT'D)

And before Eliza came, you carried
on with that whore Mary Davis,
don't think I didn't know.

Martha picks up a pan and goes to strike John with it but he
clasps her arm just in time.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

And will no doubt return to her or
some other woman now Eliza's gone.

JOHN

What do you expect when I'm wed to
an old woman who has a vile temper,
can't give me sons, has lost her
looks. It's like a prison here.

MARTHA

No, no, not me. I love you John. I
still love you, I want it to be as
it was before.

JOHN

You old witch, you drive everyone
away.

MARTHA

No, don't say that... no, please
John.

Martha goes to hold John who grabs her and twists her arms
behind her back, grabs a whip from the wall and whips her.
Martha screams.

JOHN

Don't think you are the only one
with a vicious temper Martha Brown.

John hurries out. The bell CLANGS. The door SLAMS. Martha
collapses on the floor, whimpers pathetically, defeated. She
hears John's words in her head

*'Don't think you are the only one
with a vicious temper Martha Brown'*

INT. THE BEARNS' FARMHOUSE/ KITCHEN -DAY - FLASHBACK

Simply furnished kitchen with a large black range, dresser ,
small table, chairs with window overlooking the garden

MARTHA takes a pan off the heat and puts it to one side.
BERNARD is putting a small cashbox back into the dresser.
JAMES, 8, sits at the table.

MARTHA

I hate that man.

BERNARD

Rent collectors are a breed. He's just doing his job.

MARTHA

(taking off her apron)
Come let us all go for a walk together before supper and see how Ezekiel is doing.

(calling through the window)

Eliza, we're going to go for a walk.

ELIZA (O.S)

(shouting)

I don't want to.

MARTHA

Eliza do as you're told for once in your life, please.

ELIZA (O.S.)

You're not my mother.

EXT. THE BEARNS' FARMHOUSE/GARDEN - DAY

ELIZA BEARNS, 12, tips out the fallen apples she has collected in her apron, and kicks one of them angrily.

ELIZA

I hate you. I'm glad the measles took your babies and I wish James was sick too.

BERNARD (O.S)

(calmly)

Eliza get your shawl please, we are going now.

ELIZA

Coming father.

EXT. WOODLAND TRACK - DAY

MARTHA AND BERNARD walking along with JAMES, ELIZA walks a little behind sulking.

Eliza suddenly rushes ahead passing Martha, Bernard and James. She stops and turns to James.

ELIZA

Race you!

James responds playfully and follows as fast as he can. Martha seems pleased the children at least seem to be almost playing together.

BERNARD

Martha you know I love you and I know I am not the easiest person to get on with but --

MARTHA

It is not you Bernard. Nothing has worked out how I hoped.

BERNARD

But if you will allow me to come to you again we could have another --

MARTHA

It's still too soon. I cannot sleep in your bed and I do not want another child, 'tis too painful.

Martha looks ahead

MARTHA (CONT'D)

(panicking and running)

Quickly, what is she doing, she knows the boy cannot stand heights.

EXT. A WOODLAND CLEARING - DAY

JAMES is a few feet off the ground clinging nervously to a tree. ELIZA stands below smiling. EZEKIEL, 16, stands by unsure of what to do or say.

ELIZA

Go on then.

JAMES

You're horrible Liza.

ELIZA

And you're a weakling James soft in the head just like Zekiel.

James, scared, struggles up the branches. Eliza laughs.

ELIZA (CONT'D)

Cowardly custard, can't even climb a tree... baby!

JAMES

I can, see me!

EZEKIEL

Miss, James don't seem to like the height.

ELIZA
 I know, he's such a baby.
 (calling up)
 Cry Baby! Go on right to the top.

EZEKIEL
 He might do himself an injury Miss.

ELIZA
 He needs to grow up
 (hysterically)
 To the top to the top I said. Baby,
 Baby. Baby James Baby Boy

Ezekiel moves towards the tree.

EZEKIEL
 Hang on James I'll get you down.

Eliza laughs. James loses his footing and tumbles to the ground, his body crumpled and bleeding at Eliza's feet. Eliza panics and runs off. Ezekiel stands stunned.

MARTHA and BERNARD arrive breathless. Martha collapses on to James. Bernard is looking around.

BERNARD
 Eliza!

MARTHA
 Oh God No. No. No. James! James!
 Bernard do something get some help,
 anyone.

EZEKIEL
 I think it be too late Mrs. Bearns.
 He be dead.

MARTHA
 No! He can't be. See, his eyes are
 wide open.

EZEKIEL
 I seen eyes like that before when
 there ain't no breathing in a
 person.

MARTHA
 (quieter, bewildered)
 No, he can't be dead. Bernard?

Bernard slowly, apprehensively, walks towards James's body.

EZEKIEL
 He didn't want to climb the tree
 Miss. Eliza shouted at him, made
 him do it. Made him she did.

MARTHA

Why didn't you stop her!

Eliza slowly returns full of remorse, sad. She stands behind Martha.

ELIZA

I didn't mean it. I thought he would come down.

MARTHA

You did mean it. You wanted to kill him. You are a selfish and stupid girl.

ELIZA

And you're a hateful, horrible woman.

MARTHA

You wicked girl.

ELIZA

I'm glad your children are all gone. Gone, gone, gone ..

Martha picks up a fallen branch and violently attacks Eliza with it.

BERNARD

What do you think you're doing woman?

Eliza instantly moves herself out of the way. Bernard grabs Martha pulling her off just in time.

BERNARD (CONT'D)

Do you want to kill my daughter too?

Eliza screams. Martha sobs uncontrollably. Eliza runs off. Ezekiel follows her.

BERNARD (CONT'D)

Do you want me to have no children left.

MARTHA

I, I didn't mean it I'm sorry.

Martha returns to James and drops on to his body.

BERNARD

I tell you if you don't curb that vile temper one day you will kill someone.

Bernard pulls Martha off, picks up James' body very gently.

BERNARD (CONT'D)
 And then you'll swing for it,
 believe me.

Martha is distraught, Bernard carrying James walks away.
 Martha follows but is barely able to walk.

END OF FLASHBACK

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - DAY

MARTHA sits at the table, thin and drawn looking.

ANN, mid 40 s, sits opposite looking concerned.

MARTHA
 I tried to get news to you when I
 married but no-one knew where you
 had gone.

ANN
 We traveled here, there, then
 settled not so very far from here.

MARTHA
 It's been so, so many years Ann.
 Are you happy, still with Jack?

ANN
 I am. Mary Ann is twelve now.

MARTHA
 That old?

ANN
 And quite the young lady.

MARTHA
 I'd like to see her.

ANN
 Martha, you do not look happy.

MARTHA
 I'm cheerful enough, I have John
 and the shop.

ANN
 You have it nice.

MARTHA
 The people here are quite friendly.

ANN
 But you are not satisfied I can
 tell.

MARTHA

Josiah swore he never knew about your first pregnancy you know. He said he was completely bewildered that you left.

ANN

I did like him, very much, but he had a wandering eye Martha and much as I would have liked it he would never have married me.

MARTHA

I suppose not. I was sorry the baby didn't live.

ANN

'Twas for the best. I am lucky to have Jack.

MARTHA

I have a boy.

ANN

Never?

MARTHA

Not ours. No. Do you remember Eliza, Bernard's girl?

ANN

Not a welcome memory.

MARTHA

"Tis her son. He's playing in the garden.

ANN

Never! Though with thought I am not surprised.

MARTHA

He lives with us.

ANN

And Eliza, surely not.

MARTHA

No, not her but Seth is our greatest joy.

ANN

Then I am so happy for you. Where is John?

MARTHA

He didn't come home last night

ANN
Martha?

MARTHA
What?

ANN
On my way here I spoke to a Mrs.
Knight?

EXT. THE CROSSROADS - SUNSET

VILLAGERS are gathered around MARTHA and MARY having a violent physical confrontation.

The villagers are SHOUTING for the women to stop.

Insults are thrown, hair is pulled.

Martha slaps Mary's face many times.

MARY DAVIS
(screaming out)
She's crazy.

JOHN arrives at the crossroads and pulls Martha away.

MARY DAVIS (CONT'D)
I'm going to get law on you see if
I don't.

John begins to push Martha physically down the road. John turns to Mary.

JOHN
Go home Mary.

MARY DAVIS
Coming here, putting me out of
business, attacking her neighbours.
She's crazy.

A villager approaches Mary and consoles her. Mary is ruffled, has a few scratches but is not hurt.

Everyone disperses, giving disapproving looks at Martha as she is driven home by John.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - NIGHT

MARTHA with blood seeping from scratches on her face, bodice torn, stands defiant in front of the range lifting a burnt pan from the hob and taking it to the sink.

John sits at the table.

JOHN

After a hard day a man expects some hot supper ready. Not see his woman brawling like a drunkard in the street.

MARTHA

Well supper's burnt John 'cause you are so late home.

Martha pours a jug of water on the hot burnt pan. It sizzles wildly.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

And besides I had some things to settle. I knew you'd be drinking down Rose and Crown, so I reckoned that Mary would be on her way to see you.

JOHN

Oh stop it woman, I can't stand your jealousy anymore. I ain't been with that Mary girl.

MARTHA

You were seen. Why John? WHY!!!

JOHN

(hitting Martha across the face)

Enough!

Martha CRIES OUT, he hits her again then she falls and clings to his legs.

John softens, feels her body pulsing. He sees her ripped bodice. He is aroused.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Only you be my real wife Martha. There be a difference. I love you still. It be very wrong of you to listen to gossip. I love you and you know it.

John starts caressing Martha who succumbs.

JOHN (CONT'D)

You shouldn't have left Seth alone though.

John kisses Martha.

MARTHA

Damn you John Brown.

JOHN
Come here woman.

They make love on the parlour floor.

INT. THE BROWNS' SHOP - DAY

MARTHA is stocking a shelf with made up bags of flour. She stands on a short ladder. ANN is passing her up the goods.

As Martha reaches up Ann notices scars on Martha's arm.

MARTHA
Stocking up for the cold season.

ANN
Martha?

MARTHA
Folks do more baking. I reckon these ...

ANN
Martha, if you don't mind me saying you don't look well.

MARTHA
Oh I am well enough.

ANN
Looks like a whip mark to me.

MARTHA
Ah, 'twas a good while back now. Started when Eliza left.

ANN
She did stay then.

MARTHA
For a while.

ANN
Now I see. Does he still beat you?

MARTHA
Sometimes. He has a lousy temper and drinks too much ,I know he regrets it after, he don't mean to hit me.

ANN
And so you stay with him. In spite of...

MARTHA

(climbing down)

I still love him. I really do.

ANN

You should have left him like I left Joshua. He were not a bad sort, just liked his drink too much as well. Perhaps he would have been a good father even, I don't know, but the drink is evil, I know that.

MARTHA

Seth is my one consolation. I adore him. I even think John likes him, helps me put up with it all.

ANN

A woman's lot is definitely not a happy one.

MARTHA

Maybe not. I should pick up Seth now from Susan's, come with me. She's a good friend to me Ann, loves Seth. I think she be desperate to have her own boy.

ANN

Yes, I should like that. Before I go home.

EXT.THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR- NIGHT

JOHN and SETH are playing with some wooden horses. John is in amiable mood.

JOHN

I think I should get another horse. The old hag is too vicious by half nearly knocked me off my feet today.

MARTHA

We can't afford another horse John.

JOHN

But I fear one day he might kill somebody.

MARTHA

I don't know John let's see how shop continues to fare.

JOHN

The shop is flourishing Martha, you have made a real business out of it, done well.

John stands up and faces Martha who is smiling, flattered. John caresses Martha's cheek.

JOHN (CONT'D)

So a new horse then? One that will travel greater distances and bring in even more income.

Martha smiles.

MARTHA

Maybe.

Martha lays the table with crockery. John pours himself cider from a flagon.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Oh John let us not hurt each other any more.

John and Martha fall into each others arms

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I do wish you wouldn't talk so often with Mary that's all.

JOHN

You know it's just my way, there's nothing in it.

MARTHA

I fear losing you that's all.

JOHN

Shhh!

SETH

Mama.

MARTHA

Come boy, let's have supper

John kisses Martha. Seth pulls at Martha's skirt. John picks him up.

MONTAGE - THE NEXT SIX MONTHS AT BIRDSMOORGATE

-- A long wooden table is set out adorned with plates of

food, jugs of ale and lemonade inside the Inn. A roaring fire burns in the grate. JOHN, MARTHA, RICHARD, SUSAN, MR. MRS. STAUNTON, HARRIET, ANN, MARY, WILLIAM DAVIS, 45, slightly bent back, thinning hair and their SON, 5, frail looking, all sit around the table with SETH at one end on a high stool. They are SINGING, happy and jolly celebrating Seth's third birthday.

-- It is snowing. JOHN'S horse and cart RATTLE down the lane. The cart is stacked with logs. MARY and her SON sit beside John. The horse is pulled up but behaves obstinately kicking out. Mary laughs.

-- MARTHA is splitting chunks of coal with the still blunt hatchet and putting them in the burner of the range. Seth beside her, shivers, Mary covers him with her shawl.

-- JOHN is unhitching the horse from the cart in MRS. SAMSON'S field. The horse kicks MARY who is standing behind it. Mary is upset. John comforts Mary. Mary looks to Harriet's house opposite the field. She sees HARRIET'S face at an upstairs window and smiles. John takes Mary into the hay shed.

-- The sun shines on the garden. Bushes are coming into bud. SETH with MARTHA's help is planting some small potatoes. He runs around happy.

EXT.THE ROSE AND CROWN INN - DAY

MRS. STAUNTON holds a bunch of daffodils and passes a coin to MARTHA which she puts in her pocket. SETH standing next to Martha gives Mrs. Staunton a single daffodil and in turn she gives him a coin and a kiss on the cheek.

SUPERIMPOSE: SPRING 1856

MRS STAUNTON

Thank you my dears. Look after Mama
Seth.

SETH

Yes, Ma Staunton.

Mrs Staunton goes inside carrying her daffodils. Martha and Seth walk away.

Martha glances up the hill. She sees JOHN'S HORSE AND CART parked by a tree. She sees MARY emerge from the bushes.

Martha looks confused, angry, hurries onward pulling Seth.

EXT. THE BROWN'S SHOP- DAY

HARRIET KNIGHT is waiting in front of the shop window as MARTHA breathless and SETH exhausted arrive.

There is a small carriage parked a little further down the road.

HARRIET

You've got a visitor. Two actually.

MARTHA

Visitors?

HARRIET KNIGHT

I thought I'd warn you ... Eliza is back. You won't recognize her though. She came in that carriage with a man, they've gone through.

MARTHA

Thank you Harriet. Good day.

HARRIET

Just thought I'd warn you.

MARTHA

Yes, thank you.

SETH

Who's Liza Mama?

EXT. THE BROWNS SHOP - GARDEN - DAY

ELIZA, beautiful ringlets, lavishly dressed, looking pretty in cape and bonnet stands admiring the garden. An older gentleman, MR COOMBES, 55, portly, mutton chop whiskers, well dressed in suit, top hat stands by her side.

MARTHA come through the back door with SETH who sees the strangers and buries his head in Martha's skirt.

MARTHA

Eliza!

ELIZA

Hello Martha... Hello Seth.

MARTHA

Say hello to the lady, Seth.

Seth pops his head out, looks and hides away instantly.

ELIZA

He doesn't know me.

MARTHA

What can you expect, we haven't seen or heard from you for so long.

ELIZA

He is shy?

MARTHA

You haven't come to take him back, have you?

ELIZA

He is my son.

MARTHA

No...

ELIZA

Oh this is Mr. Coombes, Joshua, my husband.

MR COOMBES

How do you do Mrs Brown?

ELIZA

My husband is a merchant from Dorchester.

MARTHA

How do you do Mr Coombes.

ELIZA

We can provide well for Seth now, he will want for nothing.

MARTHA

Shall we go inside, we can talk, have some tea. Come son.

INT.THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - DAY

Crockery and tea pot sit neatly on the table.

ELIZA, MR COOMBES and MARTHA are sat around the table. The mood is solemn. SETH sits on Martha's lap.

MR COOMBES

Sweets and biscuits mainly for the London market. Coombes Dorset Nuggets, you might have heard of them.

MARTHA

Too expensive for me to stock.

MR COOMBES

I will send you some as a gift.

MARTHA

If you don't mind me saying you are considerably older than Eliza?

MR COOMBES

And if you will forgive me Mrs. Brown no more so than you are to your husband, so my wife says.

They sit in silence for a while. Awkward.

MARTHA

You have come to take Seth back haven't you?

ELIZA

In time.

SETH

Back where mama?

MARTHA

Seth my dear, Eliza is your real mama and she wants you back.

SETH

I want to stay with you mama.

MR COOMBES

Both Eliza and myself know that you have been like a mother to Seth. We would not want to deprive you of him instantly.

ELIZA

He could come to stay with us for short holidays maybe just a visit at first.

MR COOMBES

He would have plenty of friends. I have grand children his age.

ELIZA

We could offer him a better future than you can give him Martha.

MR.COOMBES

Offer him the best education and prospects.

ELIZA

You must surely --

MARTHA

But he is my life, he's all I have.

SETH

Mama don't be sad.

ELIZA

Dearest son, Martha has cared for you well, we will not hurry anything, we do not wish to hurt anyone.

SETH

I don't want to go away.

Martha and Seth hug each other, Eliza and Mr Coombes smile, showing understanding and sympathy for the situation.

INT. THE BROWN'S HOUSE/PARLOUR - NIGHT

MARTHA kneels staring at the cold grate. She stands and idly attempts to break some coal with the blunt hatchet. John sits at the table, shining his boots.

SETH sits on the floor.

JOHN

What ails thee now, you haven't spoken a word since I returned.

MARTHA

Richard was supposed to bring around a hatchet. This is just too blunt. Nights still be a bit cold... They're going to take him back John.

JOHN

Who?... Oh is that all, is that why my supper is not ready and the fire not lit.

MARTHA

Don't you care about Seth?

JOHN

Of course I do but he is not our child, never was and you always knew he would go back to his mother one day.

MARTHA

It's a shock.

JOHN

I suppose. Now I ask you, go and make my supper.

Martha gets up from in front of the Range still holding the hatchet.

MARTHA

Make it yourself!

JOHN

I beg your pardon woman.

MARTHA

I said get it yourself or get Mary Davis to make it for you. I know you were with her today.

JOHN

So this is what this is all about.

MARTHA

No it's about my grief John, my losing you and now losing Seth.

JOHN

I said go and make my supper.

MARTHA

No I won't. Tell me you haven't been with Mary Davis today?

JOHN

I haven't.

MARTHA

I saw your cart on the hill and she came out from the bushes. Who else would she be with?

JOHN

George Fookes. I might have loaned the cart to George for the day.

MARTHA

You know it was you, you liar.

JOHN

Enough, what I do during the day is my business. Now if you don't get my supper I will beat you again.

MARTHA

And if you do I will scream.

JOHN

You are crazy Martha. Who would cling to a child that was not their own. What kind of wife refuses to make his husband's supper.

MARTHA

Tell me you are not Mary Davis' lover,

JOHN

You are losing your mind woman.

MARTHA

Tell me you didn't meet her today, tell me you love me, tell me.

JOHN

You are mad woman. Yes I picked Mary Davis up to today, I often do. She needed a ride, that's all.

MARTHA

(screaming)

Liar! Liar! Liar!

Martha throws the hatchet wildly in John's direction and it CRASHES into the table.

John, enraged, throws one of his boots at Martha's face, grabs her, pulls her hair, hits her across the face, throws her across the chair, takes off his belt, pulls up her skirt and beats her across the legs and backside preventing her from screaming by gagging her mouth.

JOHN

Now make me my supper

SETH

(distressed and crying)

Mama? Papa?

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP - DAY

MARTHA is handing over a bag of flour to SUSAN standing the other side of the counter.

Susan stares sadly at Martha who forces a smile.

Seth plays behind the counter.

SUSAN

How came you your black eye?

MARTHA

Oh that, I bumped into the door put
a bit of beefsteak on it yesterday
but 'tis slow to heal. Anything
else you need today?

SUSAN

It looks very sore Martha? Martha?
Are you all right?

Martha breaks down and cries. Susan goes to the other side of
the counter and comforts Martha.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

It's John he beats you doesn't he?

MARTHA

He doesn't mean to.

SUSAN

Is it about Mary Davis?

MARTHA

You know about Mary?

SUSAN

The whole village knows Martha,
I don't think it is very serious.

MARTHA

But it's so humiliating for me and
on top of all that I am going to
lose Seth as well.

SUSAN

How? Why?

MARTHA

Eliza wants him back.

SETH

Don't want to go back mama.

SUSAN

That's awful Martha.

SETH

Don't like Liza.

MARTHA

Seth dear go and get mama her
shawl...

(MORE)

MARTHA (CONT'D)

What's worse is I now think it's probably for the best, I fear that one day John might turn on him too. Look!

Martha shows Susan the full extent of John's beatings on her legs.

SUSAN

Oh Martha I had no idea it was so bad.

MARTHA

But, I still love him Susan. I do.

SUSAN

Folks have no sympathy for Mary Davis. They call her wanton, mischievous.

MARTHA

But why should folks have sympathy for her, I don't.

SUSAN

She is young, lonely just having some fun where she can, the village is a desolate place, her husband is old can't give her any more children.

Seth returns carrying Martha's shawl.

MARTHA

Thank you my dear.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - DAY

MARTHA places a straw hat on SETH. MR COOMBES stands upright, looks important, intimidating.

MARTHA

This is for your own good my darling and we will see each other again very soon.

SETH

Will we Mama?

MARTHA

Yes my dear, I promise.

MR COOMBES

I am sure you are doing the right thing Martha and if the boy is in anyway unhappy then we shall send him straight back to you.

Martha hands Seth a little packed bag of his possessions and the toy wooden horse.

MARTHA

Bye bye my sweet, be good to your new mama and papa and if we don't see each other again know that we will always remember each other and I will always love you.

Martha placing Seth's hand in Mr.Coombes' hand.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

I know he will be better off with you sir, you can give him things I'll never be able to give. I am not well off see, never will be, never managed to make good of my life though 'twas not for trying.

MR COOMBES

I am glad it was your decision.

MARTHA

Will his mother not come in?

MR COOMBES

Eliza knows it will be too painful, she knows what the child means to you.

MARTHA

It is very kind of your wife. In the past I have misunderstood her, I'm sure she will be a good mother. It is only right and fitting Seth goes to her.

Mr Coombes leads Seth out. Martha stands devastated. She hears the door bell CLANG. She runs after them.

EXT.THE BROWNS' SHOP- DAY

SETH climbs into the waiting carriage. MR COOMBES follows. ELIZA holds up Seth's hand to wave goodbye. MARTHA sobs silently.

SETH

Bye bye Mama.

Eliza leans out the window looking sympathetic. Martha watches, she turns her head away only to see HARRIET and MARY, who is holding her own son's hand, watch the carriage drive off.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - DAY

Martha is cheery, she clears away JOHN'S breakfast plate.

SUPERIMPOSE: 6TH JULY

John and GEORGE FOOKES sit at the table. John laces his boots and George mops up the fat on his plate with bread.

MARTHA

When will you be back John?

JOHN

I won't be late I promise.

MARTHA

I'll have something nice for your supper.

JOHN

You spoil me lately Martha.

GEORGE FOOKES

Aye, that were a lovely piece of bacon Martha.

John stands and puts on his hat. George stands.

MARTHA

Will you be taking your cart as well George.

GEORGE FOOKES

Aye, I'll be traveling right behind John. Can't fit all them poles into one cart, can we John?

MARTHA

Could you bring us back two yards of muslin from Beaminster?

JOHN

Muslin?

MARTHA

Yes I would fancy dressing up the shop window.

JOHN

Sounds a charming idea.

John kisses Martha. She looks almost happy but at the same time strangely apprehensive. John and George leave.

The shop bell CLANGS.

SERIES OF SHOTS - MARTHA'S DAY

- A) MARTHA in the shop, packs up some groceries in a bag and is smiling at HARRIET.
- B) MARTHA in the parlour, breaking up coal with the hatchet and getting a good fire going in the range.
- C) MARTHA taking a steak pie out the oven and putting it on the table and burning her finger.
- D) MARTHA drying her washed hair with a towel.
- E) MARTHA sitting in the garden in the sun. The shop bell CLANGS.

INT.THE BROWN'S SHOP - DAY

MARTHA entering, shaking her black curls. SUSAN stands the other side of the counter.

SUSAN

Martha you look nice.

MARTHA

Thank you, I want to make myself look younger. I think I've put too much these past months into caring for Seth and not paid enough attention to John.

SUSAN

Did he say that?

MARTHA

No, not at all. But I've been unfair, pre-occupied. 'Tis no wonder he made a pass or two at Mary.

SUSAN

Quite a change of heart Martha but maybe you are right. Richard says John means well.

MARTHA

I've made a special supper too. John promised he won't be late.

SUSAN

It's good to see you happier. I came to see if you were all right. I do worry about you.

MARTHA

No need. Today I fair well.

SUSAN

Good. You and John must come around for supper.

The door bell CLANGS and Harriet comes in.

HARRIET

Good afternoon Susan, Martha.

SUSAN

Good day Harriet. I'll be in tomorrow Martha.

Martha nods and smiles, Susan leaving.

HARRIET

You're looking handsome today.

MARTHA

Well thank you, what would you like today?

HARRIET

Half a pound of dripping please.

Martha weighing out the fat.

HARRIET (CONT'D)

By the way I see Mary Davis riding on the high road this morning with your husband. Do she be actually working for him now?

MARTHA

No, why do you ask?

HARRIET

Oh maybe I shouldn't have mentioned it, still George Fookes were close behind so no harm done.

MARTHA

What do you mean no harm done, there is nothing wrong with a giving a neighbour a lift.

HARRIET

Probably helping her with her washing load.

MARTHA

Aye, that's what I think. That will be tuppence Mrs Knight.

Harriet passes Martha the coins and leaves. The door bell CLANGS. Martha slumps on a stool, staring at the door, tears in her eyes. The bell CLANGS again. Mrs Staunton enters the shop.

MRS STAUNTON
Are you all right my dear?

MARTHA
Yes, sorry... your usual?

MRS STAUNTON
Thank you.

Martha weighing out flour into a bag.

MARTHA
Has Mary been at the inn at all today?

MRS STAUNTON
Haven't seen her for days. She be last seen celebrating the news.

MARTHA
News?

MRS STAUNTON
Did Susan not tell you. Mary is expecting again.

MARTHA
A baby, but her husband is surely too old.

MRS STAUNTON
Well I did hear that the old man was incapable but who knows?

Martha gives the bag to Mrs Staunton.

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - NIGHT

Martha sits staring at the cold steak pie on the table. She picks it up and throws it in the fire.

She paces up and down, watches the clock, sits down weak, weary, defeated, sick at heart. The clock STRIKES once.

MARTHA
(to herself)
Damn you John Brown. Damn you.

Martha falls asleep.

INT. COURTROOM (DORCHESTER) - DAY

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC look excited, bustling around, talking, filling all available seats in the public gallery.

Among the public sit FRANCIS and ROBERT BROWN and CHRISTIANA, JACOB AND JOSHUA SYMES, MARY DAVIS, ANN, GEORGE FOOKES.

SUPERIMPOSE: 26TH JULY

A jury of TEN MEN assemble in the allocated stalls.

General chaos, disorder, LOUD CHATTER from public gallery.

MR. COMPTON, 45, grey wig, whiskers, imposing stature carrying papers and documents takes up a position in front of the Judges Bench and facing the centrally situated dock.

MR. STOCK , 50, white wig, carrying paper files which he places on a large table sits beside Mr. Compton.

RICHARD and SUSAN, HARRIET, DR. WILLIAM BROSTER, 40, take up their seats on a bench opposite the Jury, close to the witness stand.

A COURT OFFICIALS stand to one side of the witness bench.

CONSTABLE HULL, 30, fresh faced, sympathetic expression and MARTHA, pale, drawn looking, dishevelled, in a state of shock, emerge from stairs leading from the cells below and directly into the dock.

THE JUDGE enters, sits, surveys his courtroom, brings down his gavel. SILENCE

JUDGE

Elizabeth Martha Brown. You are charged with the crime that you did willfully and cruelly murder your husband John Anthony Brown. How do you plead?

MARTHA BROWN

Not Guilty Sir.

Mr. Compton steps forward facing Martha.

MR COMPTON

Mrs Brown will you tell the court exactly what happened on the night of 6th July in this year of our Lord Eighteen Hundred and Fifty Six.

MARTHA BROWN

Sir, it were around two in the morning I were shivering with the cold, the fire had gone out. I was tired and sleepy. I heard a groaning outside the shop. I went to look and it be my John. He says he be kicked by the horse. He be lying there with his face all bloody, it was horrible.

MR COMPTON

Alive then but evidently badly injured so why did you not get help?

MARTHA

Because he was breathing Sir.

MR COMPTON

But clearly in need of help.

MARTHA

Yes.

MR COMPTON

Where does your husband keep his horse and cart?

MARTHA

Mrs. Samson's field up the road.

MR COMPTON

I see... On what business was your husband about that day? For him to be coming home so late.

MARTHA

He was going to Beaminster with George Fookes. They were delivering wood. Lots of wood. John was going to get some linen for me for the shop window.

MR COMPTON

But why so late home?

MARTHA takes a deep breath, thinks better of it and shakes her head.

DISSOLVE TO:

SERIES OF SHOTS - JOHN'S DAY

A) JOHN and GEORGE'S horses and carts, the one in front of the other trot along a dusty road. MARY sits along side

John, wearing his battered hat. They giggle and cuddle.
The sun is rising.

- B) Outside a wood merchants JOHN and GEORGE are unloading logs from their carts.
- C) Outside a haberdashery shop door where dresses, hats and rolls of linen are displayed in the window. Stands MARY who is carrying two paper bags. JOHN meets her as he is about to enter. Mary takes John's hand and teases him away. She puts on John's hat. They walk down the road arm in arm and disappear down an alleyway . A town clock STRIKES twice.
- D) Two Horses and empty carts are tied up outside the George Inn. GEORGE FOOKES enters the GEORGE INN.
- E) In the town square JOHN and MARY sit on a bench. Mary gets up, gives John back his hat and walks down the road alone waving goodbye to John. A town clock STRIKES four times

INT. THE GEORGE INN- DAY

A Clock is STRIKING six times.

JOHN, his hat on the counter is drinking with GEORGE and two other local MEN, drinking, laughing, drunk.

GEORGE

Come on then John, drink up we best
be on our way, back to your woman.

JOHN

Aye.

GEORGE

Her who makes the best breakfast in
the land.

FIRST MAN

And's keeping your bed warm for you
when you return.

JOHN

True, 'tis such a pity she get so
jealous.

SECOND MAN

Do her?

GEORGE

Well he shouldn't give her such
cause. 'Tis no wonder.

JOHN

There's no harm in giving a
neighbour a ride when she needs it,
no harm done.

FIRST MAN

Just be a friendly gesture.

JOHN

Aye, another drink George

GEORGE

Another drink then.

INT. THE CROSS KEYS INN - NIGHT

A clock is STRIKING nine times.

JOHN and GEORGE very drunk and unsteady sit with MEN AND
WOMEN on benches at tables littered with tankards and cider
jars.

NOISY and jovial atmosphere.

JOHN

(singing)

As I was a walking one morning in
May I spied a young couple a making
the hay.

John lifting his tankard and emptying it down his throat.

GEORGE

I wager them horses be getting a
bit restless now John.

JOHN

(picking up his hat)

Back home then George, my friend.
Good night all.

GEORGE

Aye 'twill be after midnight 'fore
we get home.

EXT. CROSSROADS - NIGHT

JOHN and GEORGE horses part company at the crossroads and go opposite ways.

SUPERIMPOSE: 1.00 am

They are very unsteady but cheerful. The carts sway about. John looks flushed, his eyes wander about, his head looks heavy.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COURTROOM DORCHESTER - DAY

MARTHA face is white, she looks sick but stands in the dock calm. All OTHERS as before.

Mr. COMPTON has the face and posture of judicial confidence.

MR COMPTON

Would it not be true to say that if you were still awake as you say you were that --

MARTHA

Sleepy Sir. I might have been asleep.

MR COMPTON

You would have heard the horse and carts pass by, some time before. I believe your shop is situated very near to the road which --

MARTHA

Yes, yes I did hear them Sir, so I knew he would not be long coming as he had just to go to the field but it were in fact an unusually long time I waited and waited 'til I heard this terrible groaning like I said outside.

MARTHA swallows hard, her hands resting on the wooden dock front. She is more assured.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

John muttered 'I be kicked by the horse' and I said 'how John?' He could hardly utter the words but he said he unhitched the cart...

MR COMPTON

Why do you persist in lying to the court Mrs. Brown?

MARTHA

I am not, I have said the truth, he
came to his own death from the
kicks of a horse. 'Twas a feisty
horse always was ... I am innocent
I tell you innocent.

MARTHA looks around desperately to others in the courtroom
for support. She looks at SUSAN who shakes her head sadly.

MR COMPTON

(picking up a document)

Yet at the coroner's inquest, which
I believe was held at The Rose and
Crown. Surgeon Henry Hounsell said,
in this report, that the injuries
quote were 'unusually severe, I
found six wounds on his head....'

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROSE AND CROWN INN - DAY

The Inn is packed with VILLAGERS.

MR. MRS. STAUNTON stand behind the bar. At the bar stand
RICHARD and SUSAN DAMON, FRANCIS, looking particularly stern,
and ROBERT BROWN, MARY DAVIS and GEORGE FOOKES.

MARTHA sits in a daze before other VILLAGERS.

HARRIET KNIGHT sits close to Martha.

Surgeon HENRY HOUNSELL, holding his report stands with
shaking hands.

HENRY HOUNSELL

Other parts of his body were
without any mark or wound, except a
slight injury to one finger on the
left hand. Four wounds on his head
were about an inch in length
exposing the skull. The frontal,
both parietal and the left temporal
bones were much fractured with
protrusion of brain at the frontal
wound.

Henry Hounsell wipes his brow. Some villagers looking sick.
Martha staring stoically ahead. Francis goes weak at the
knees and is held upright by Richard.

HENRY HOUNSELL (CONT'D)
 There was an even longer wound
 above the eyebrow and bruises over
 the nasal bones.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

MARTHA

As I said before Sir, when I found
 him on the doorstep he were indeed
 very wounded but alive and talking
 and he said he'd been kicked by the
 horse. I got him in as best I
 could.

Mr Compton gestures to the court official.

COURT OFFICIAL

(stepping forward)

Call Mrs Knight to the witness
 stand.

HARRIET KNIGHT takes the witness stand.

MR COMPTON

Mrs Knight would you tell the court
 where you live.

HARRIET

I live opposite the field where
 John keeps... kept his horse.

MR COMPTON

And what did you see that night?

HARRIET

I see the shadow of the horse in
 the field and I hear it chewing the
 grass behind the gate.

MR COMPTON

Did you see John Brown?

HARRIET

I see a man staggering past
 Elizabeth Samson's house, she do
 own the field Sir.

MR COMPTON

Was it John Brown?

HARRIET

Most probably Sir, I only saw the
 shadow, but 'tis usually John who
 do often go home drunk late.

MR COMPTON

Thank you Mrs Knight, I understand also that you were later called to the Brown's shop.

HARRIET

Yes Sir, I be roused urgently 'bout six by Mr Damon to go to the Brown's house as he says John's been killed.

MR COMPTON

And when you got there what did you see outside the premises?

HARRIET

Well nothing Sir, outside.

MR COMPTON

Did you see any blood?

HARRIET

I didn't see any blood outside or in the shop. I told the inquest that I said to Martha at the time that I doubt the horse killed him. But I be a good friend to Mrs Brown, always have.

MR. COMPTON

Thank you Mrs. Knight. You may stand down.

Mr Compton gestures to the court official.

COURT OFFICIAL

Call Mr. Richard Damon to the stand.

Richard takes the stand.

MR COMPTON

Your name?

RICHARD

Richard Damon Sir.

MR COMPTON

I understand Mr Damon that you are the deceased's cousin?

RICHARD

I am.

MR COMPTON

Would you explain to the court what happened on the morning of 7th July Mr Damon?

RICHARD

It were about 5 o'clock and there
be a loud banging at bedroom window
and it were Martha begging me to
come quick cause John had nearly
been killed by the horse.

MR COMPTON

So you went with her to the shop?

RICHARD

Yes.

MR COMPTON

And when you got there what did you
find?

RICHARD

I see our John in such a state
lying on parlour floor. I was in
shock. I knew he be dead. I told
Martha that he was dead.

MR COMPTON

And how did Mrs Brown respond?

RICHARD

She seemed surprised and said 'be
'e?'

MR COMPTON

Then what did you do?

RICHARD

I asked her why she didn't call
before and she said because he had
hold of her dress and wouldn't let
her go.

MR COMPTON

So Mrs Brown, you admit you did in
fact do nothing to try and save
your husband's life.

The public gallery is rowdy,

PUBLIC GALLERY

(simultaneously)

That woman killed him.
They be always arguing.
John worked hard to keep her he
did.
She should have stayed where she
came from.
Didn't belong here.
Old witch.
Murderer.

JUDGE

Order!

MARTHA

I tried hard to fit in your honour.
 What they say is not true. I loved
 John. It was the same at the
 inquest everyone shouted at me no
 one likes me, they never did. I
 didn't do anything. I didn't. I
 didn't.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. ROSE AND CROWN INN - DAY

EVERYONE as before.

VILLAGERS

(simultaneously)

We do always hear screams coming
 from the house.
 He only married 'er for money.
 She did never fit in with us here.
 Always thought she were better than
 us.

Susan standing forward.

SUSAN

Stop it everyone. She ain't done
 anyone any harm. She ain't.

MARY

(visibly upset)

'cept killed her husband.

FRANCIS

My only son.

MARTHA

I didn't kill him. I know the
 horse. He said it were his horse.
 John wanted another horse but we
 didn't have enough money.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

MARTHA shows signs of strain and distress. WILLIAM BROSTER is
 in the witness stand. EVERYONE ELSE as before.

WILLIAM BROSTER

I am William Broster your honour,
surgeon from Beaminster.

MR COMPTON

You carried out the official post-
mortem on Mr Brown I believe.

WILLIAM BROSTER

I did sir.

MR COMPTON

Would you tell the court what you
found.

WILLIAM BROSTER

When I removed the brain, at the
back of the head and at the lower
part of the brain there was a large
quantity of blood that had effused
from a number of wounds.

MR COMPTON

And what in your professional
opinion might have inflicted such
wounds.

WILLIAM BROSTER

The wounds were such that might
have been produced by a blunt
instrument --

MR COMPTON

A horse's shoe perhaps?

WILLIAM BROSTER

No but perhaps the back edge of an
axe, a hatchet possibly.

MR COMPTON

And could any of the wounds that
you have described cause death?

WILLIAM BROSTER

Certainly three of the kind I have
mentioned could have and if he did
receive the injuries in the field,
which I doubt, then he certainly
could not have walked to his home
which I understand has been
calculated for the court to be a
distance of one hundred and thirty
yards.

MR COMPTON

But if by some chance he did, could the accused have held the deceased alive for more than two hours after he received such wounds?

WILLIAM BROSTER

No Sir, he would have been dead long time before.

MARTHA

(crying out)

I did hold him. He were alive I tell you. He spoke to me.

WILLIAM BROSTER

'Tis as I said your honour.

William Broster steps down and SUSAN DAMON stands in the witness box. MR STOCK taking over the questioning

MR STOCK

Mrs. Damon you say you and your husband are good friends of the Browns.

SUSAN

We are Sir, Martha was my dearest friend.

MR STOCK

Are you aware of The Browns owning a hatchet or such like instrument?

SUSAN

They did Sir, but Martha wanted to borrow one of ours 'cause hers were blunt. Richard never got 'round to it though.

MR STOCK

Where did she keep her hatchet?

SUSAN

'Suppose by the grate. Martha wouldn't have hurt John sir, she were looking forward to him coming home that evening. I saw her in the afternoon, she washed her hair and all.

MR STOCK

Would you say that Mr and Mrs Brown's marriage was a happy one?

SUSAN

She loved him Sir, though he sometimes hit her.

MR STOCK

He hit her

SUSAN

Yes, badly Sir. But she loved him all the same and in his way I think he loved her.

MR STOCK

Do you know if she ever hit him back.

SUSAN

Of course Sir, wouldn't any of us?

MR STOCK

Thank you. You may step down. Bring back Mr Broster.

The PUBLIC are tired and hot, they fan themselves.

COURT OFFICIAL

Recall William Broster to the witness stand.

William Broster takes the stand. Mr. STOCK stands before William Broster.

MR STOCK

Sir, with such injuries as have already been described to the court by yourself please tell the court again could John Brown have walked, yes or no.

WILLIAM BROSTER

I have been present when a skull was fractured once before but I have never seen half a dozen fractures, in fact I have seen a patient breathe after wards even though they not be conscious. Sometimes I believe that persons have lived years after a single injury.

MR STOCK

Yes or No Mr Broster?

WILLIAM BROSTER

Well, 'tis possible.

MR STOCK

But if as stated a piece of bone was driven into the brain then this most certainly would have prevented him from walking would it not?

WILLIAM BROSTER

Yes.

MR STOCK

Then we must conclude that as there were so many other wounds also, your answer is No.

WILLIAM BROSTER

Yes

MR STOCK

Exactly and my Lord with the absence of any blood found in the shop or on the road from the field to the door step, it would appear (looking at Martha) that the defendant is lying. The deceased could not have sustained his injuries in the field and walked such a distance.

MARTHA

I am not lying.

MR STOCK

Mrs Brown, there is overwhelming opinion that your husband could not have suffered such injuries and remain alive to utter one word let alone walk the distance from the field to your home. Is not your story then of the horse just a trumped up fabrication... a story to protect --

MARTHA

(panicking)

No... NO... NO ... Yes ... I don't know.

MR STOCK

Yes?

Martha looks utterly defeated. The Court is SILENT. Then a few GASPS. Then the public gallery erupts into an hysterical frenzy of excitement and self-satisfaction.

JUDGE

Silence... Silence in my court.

MR. STOCK

Mrs. Brown tell us please what exactly did happen that night.

MARTHA

We had an argument that's all, John rushed upstairs angrily ... He...
(MORE)

MARTHA (CONT'D)

he came by his death by falling down the stairs. Yes, he wasn't feeling well and went upstairs in the dark and fell. I swear I did not strike my husband.

MR STOCK

My Lord, we have now heard a sudden change in the story as told by Mrs. Brown, so I determine we need question no more.

Mr. Stock turns to address the Jury.

My Lord Gentlemen of the Jury, it is now for you to decide whether John Brown died from the injuries caused by a kick of a horse as was so emphatically described initially by the accused or did he die as a consequence of falling down the stairs after an argument ordid he suffer at the blows of a hatchet administered by his wife in a fit of rage.

JUDGE

Gentlemen of the Jury I ask you now to retire and consider all the evidence before delivering your verdict.

One by one the jury men shuffle out of their seats and disappear through a hidden door. The Judge also stands and leaves.

COURT OFFICIAL

The Court is now in cessation.

Martha descends the stairs to the cells followed by Constable Hull.

INT. COURTROOM / STONE STAIRWELL - DAY

It is dark and narrow. MARTHA walks down the stairs in front of CONSTABLE HULL. She stops and turns.

MARTHA

You promised it would be a fair trial Mr Hull. I am innocent I tell you.

CONSTABLE HULL

'Tis not going so well Mrs Brown, I fear.

MARTHA

You promised. I remember when you arrested me, in the wagon, you said

--

CONSTABLE HULL

I said 'Twas a fair old journey to Dorchester gaol. Perhaps you be thinking of that.

INT. COURTROOM - NIGHT

The JURY shuffle back to their seats. MARTHA stands with CONSTABLE HULL in the dock, bewildered. ALL OTHERS as before. The JUDGE enters and sits. A COURT OFFICIAL rises.

COURT OFFICIAL

Members of the jury, have you reached a verdict?

JURY MEMBER

We have.

There is SILENCE in the courtroom.

COURT OFFICIAL

And?

JURY MEMBER

Guilty, My Lord.

There are GASPS and WHISPERS from the public gallery. Francis smiles satisfied, Mary holding her belly cries.

Susan falls to her knees and is supported by Richard. Harriet shakes her head.

JUDGE

Elizabeth Martha Brown you have been found guilty of the murder of your husband John Anthony Brown and that you carried out the deed in a pre-meditated and malicious manner. The Law must now take its course.

The Judge places the black cloth on his head.

JUDGE (CONT'D)

In ten days forth you shall be taken to the scaffold and will be hanged until dead. And that your body be afterward buried within the precincts of the prison. May God have mercy on your soul.

Martha collapses and is held up by Constable Hull.

MARTHA

I loved him.

The courtroom is quieter with almost a sense of them being sorry about their previous judgements. Some pray and sign the cross.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

The cell is cold dark stone with metal bars on a tiny window in the heavy wooden door. Outside of the cell on a facing wall is a tiny slit of a window where a thin streak of sunlight shines through.

MARTHA lies on her tiny bed, eyes wide open.

The door opens and EMELIA, 38, in prison warden's dress standing in the doorway

EMELIA

Staying up all night brooding
doesn't do any good.

MARTHA

I never thought it would come to
this Emelia.

EMELIA

You should try and get some sleep.

MARTHA

I am innocent. How came I to be
condemned?

EMELIA

Listen all is not lost, there is
time for a reprieve. They do not
like to hang a woman. Try and
sleep.

MARTHA

How can I sleep, I have such bad
thoughts, I feel the rope around my
neck already. Folks staring,
shouting at me. They all think me
guilty.

EMELIA

I don't think that Martha. Not
exactly.

MARTHA

You don't?

EMELIA

No and I'm sure there are many like me, now please try and sleep. A reprieve will come.

MARTHA

You think there is a little hope then?

EMELIA

Yes.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA sits on her bed. EMELIA enters. Martha stands.

EMELIA

You have a visitor Martha.

Emelia stands to one side. In the open doorway we see the figure of FRANCIS BROWN.

MARTHA

Francis! How are you? I am so sorry about John, I know how it feels to lose a son. I do. I really do.

FRANCIS

You killed him.

MARTHA

That is not true, everyone knows the horse did it, everyone knows.

FRANCIS

No Martha everyone thinks it is you who did it.

(turning her head)

Don't they Richard?

MARTHA

Richard is here?

RICHARD appears behind Francis.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

You believe me don't you Richard, Susan must, surely? Is she here too?

RICHARD

No, I am just here to be with my Aunt.

FRANCIS

I cannot forgive you Martha. I never will. I will pray for you.

MARTHA

There is no need to pray. I have lost two husbands and two darling boys, no three, four. I know no God.

FRANCIS

Then you are a wicked godless murderer. Richard take me away from this god forsaken place.

Martha sits back down on her bed and cries. Francis and Richard hasten out the cell, Emelia hurries in and comforts her.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA is asleep.

CHRISTIANA throws her arms around Martha's neck waking her. Martha is startled. EMELIA stands in the open doorway.

CHRISTIANA

Oh Martha I never thought to see you in this terrible situation.

MARTHA

It's good of you to come.

CHRISTIANA

I don't believe you killed John, nor does father, we don't believe you are capable of such a thing.

MARTHA

Unlike your mother.

CHRISTIANA

Many people are now trying to get you a reprieve Martha. Petitions are going all around Dorset.

EMELIA

Some are saying the trial was unjust, witnesses not cross examined adequately. No defense.

MARTHA

It seemed so rushed.

CHRISTIANA

A reprieve will come Martha. Justice will be done.

Christiana kisses Martha, holding her hand

CHRISTIANA (CONT'D)

You must come and stay with us...
when this is all over.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA sits on the bed. THE PRISON GOVERNOR is standing in the doorway. Martha stands up.

PRISON GOVERNOR

Mrs Brown, it is my duty to inform you that your execution has been fixed for Sat 9th August at eight o'clock in the morning.

MARTHA

But I am told there are petitions going around for my reprieve.

PRISON GOVERNOR

That is not the same as an actual judicial reprieve and until the Home Secretary says otherwise the sentence stands.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA lies on her bed. The Prison door opens.

MARTHA

(sitting up)

Ann!

ANN falls into Martha's arms crying.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Don't cry, I am going to be reprieved. I will not die because I did not kill John.

ANN

Martha, listen, no one believes you didn't kill John, all the evidence points to --

MARTHA

You believe me don't you?

ANN

I am sorry Martha, not even me.

MARTHA

(pushing Ann away)

Ann how could you?

ANN

I love you, you know that and I know that you did what you did because you were sorely provoked.

MARTHA

No.

ANN

I saw the whip marks on you, remember.

MARTHA

Yes, but --

ANN

I also know you have a temper. John beat you and you retaliated, didn't you?

MARTHA

No, that is not how it was!

ANN

Martha I am sure that you regretted it immediately and now you have blotted it out of your mind.

MARTHA

No.

ANN

You must tell all of what happened, it might save your life.

MARTHA

Save my life? But the reprieve?

ANN

'Tis not given yet but if you repent now then everyone will see that you were severely incensed, provoked beyond belief.

MARTHA

Oh Ann, what have I become.

Martha and Ann cling to each other.

INT. PRISON ROOM - NIGHT

MARTHA is sitting with The Prison CHAPLAIN, mid 40 s, dressed in his black robes and clean shaven. The room has a small table, with a chair at each end. On the table is a large hard backed black book, pen and ink. It is lit by a single church candle. The light illuminates their faces.

CHAPLAIN

Thank you Martha for asking to see me. You are wise. You must now tell the truth about what happened that night. I beg you to humble yourself before our Lord.

MARTHA

God has never shown any goodness to me before.

CHAPLAIN

A confession now would help the petitions and I promise you I will personally take them to the Home Secretary in great haste.

MARTHA

You promise Sir?

CHAPLAIN

I promise. Are you ready?

MARTHA

Yes.

The Chaplain opens his book and dips his pen in ink and writes.

MARTHA (CONT'D)

John, he came home on the Sunday morning, at two o'clock, in liquor, and was sick. I said to him...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP/PARLOUR - NIGHT

MARTHA her head resting on the table is asleep.

The door bell CLANGS. Martha wakes.

SUPERIMPOSE: 2.00 PM

John stumbles through the parlour door, very drunk.

MARTHA

Where's your hat John?

JOHN

What's it to you woman? Now, get me some cold tea!

MARTHA

(standing up)

I don't have any cold but I can make you some warm.

Martha sleepily puts the kettle on the range. John angrily pushes the kettle off the stove and it CRASHES to the floor.

JOHN

Drink it yourself and be damned!

MARTHA

What makes you so cross? 'Tis you who are so late home.

(suddenly remembering)

Have you been with Mary?

JOHN

Damn your jealousy woman.

MARTHA

You have been with her I know it. Is it your child John, is it? Is it? Tell me.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON ROOM - NIGHT

MARTHA

We continued arguing 'til...

CHAPLAIN

What time Martha?

MARTHA

I don't know, the clock had passed striking thrice I think.

CHAPLAIN

Then?

MARTHA

Then he struck me a severe blow on the side of my head.

Martha wipes her eyes with her sleeve. Her hands are shaking.

CHAPLAIN

What happened next. What really happened. You must tell me the truth Martha.

MARTHA

Then he struck me across the shoulder.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. THE BROWN'S SHOP - NIGHT

MARTHA falls to her knees, holding her head in her hands.

JOHN spins around and grabs a whip hanging on the wall. He mercilessly attacks Martha who is cowering on the floor.

SUPERIMPOSE: 3.15 am

MARTHA

(screaming)

Stop it John. John stop it. No! No!
If you strike me again I will cry
murder!

JOHN

If you do I will knock your brains
through the window.

Martha crouches on the floor. John kicks Martha viciously.

JOHN (CONT'D)

I hope I should find you dead in
the morning.

John kicks Martha again. He then sits on a chair and unties his boots. Martha struggles to her feet, grabs the hatchet and brings it down hard on John's head. He falls instantly. Martha strikes him over and over again when he is down.

John lays dead on the floor, his face covered in blood

Martha kneels by John's body, terrified, shaking, clutching the hatchet dripping blood.

MARTHA

John, get up John. I Love you, I
didn't mean to hit you. I got
scared. Speak to me John, speak to
me please. John ...

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. PRISON ROOM - NIGHT

CHAPLAIN

Did you know what you were doing?

MARTHA

No, No, NO! I was almost out of my
senses he hit me so hard.

CHAPLAIN

Martha you have done what is right
by God and for your own redemption.
(MORE)

CHAPLAIN (CONT'D)

I am here to offer what comfort I can and the comfort will come from hope in our Lord.

MARTHA

How can I hope in the Lord if he allows an innocent woman to be sent to the scaffold. I defended myself. 'Tis all.

CHAPLAIN

Martha you must never give in to the sins of despair. The Lord is there to comfort not condemn.

MARTHA

Circumstances have meant that I cannot believe in his goodness.

CHAPLAIN

Why do you reject God?

MARTHA

Because God has rejected me.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA sits on her bed. She has an air of resignation about her. EMELIA sits by her side.

They hear BANGING outside and men's voices.

MARTHA

They are building the scaffold aren't they Emelia?

EMELIA

You shouldn't listen Martha.

MARTHA

Has the Chaplain departed?

EMELIA

He has, he went on the London train this morning.

MARTHA

We can only hope then?

EMELIA

Yes, we must hope.

INT. TRAIN CARRIAGE - DAY - TRAVELLING

The CHAPLAIN clutching the petitions, sits

CHAPLAIN (V.O.)

If only Martha had made it known about her husband's violence when she were at the assizes. The people are on her side now.

INT. PARLIAMENT/HALL - DAY

A grand hallway with many doors leading off. The Hall is bustling with MEN rushing to and fro purposefully.

The CHAPLAIN is standing with a GOVERNMENT SECRETARY, 24, boyish looking.

SECRETARY

My apologies to you, but Sir George Grey is absent at the moment in Ireland. Mr. Waddington, the under secretary to the Home Office will see you though.

The Chaplain is led by the Secretary through a heavy panelled door.

INT. PARLIAMENT/OFFICE - DAY

MR WADDINGTON, 50, long sideburns, sits behind a large desk smoking a cigar. THE SECRETARY enters followed by THE CHAPLAIN a little overawed.

SECRETARY

Under Secretary Sir, the Rev. Dacre Clemetson from Dorset is here to talk with you.

Secretary leaves.

MR WADDINGTON

(standing)

It is a pleasure to see you Sir. What can I do for you?

CHAPLAIN

'Tis a most pressing appeal. There has been a grave injustice. In Dorchester Prison Martha Brown awaits execution for the murder of her husband for which she does indeed confess but the circumstances involve much provocation and violence on his part.

MR WADDINGTON

Was she deliberately trying to
deceive the court

CHAPLAIN

No. She was out of her wits. In the
name of God..

(offering the petitions)

Many persons have added their names
in agreement that she should not
die herself. See here!

He hands the petitions to Mr Waddington who scans through
them.

CHAPLAIN (CONT'D)

So I ask you courteously Sir for a
stay of execution, a reprieve.

There is spell of absolute SILENCE. Then Mr. Waddington hands
back the petitions to the Chaplain

MR WADDINGTON

If I could do you the service I
most certainly would.

CHAPLAIN

Sir, please there is so little
time.

MR WADDINGTON

It is only Sir George, who can
grant this and unfortunately the
home secretary is engaged elsewhere
at present.

CHAPLAIN

There must be --

MR WADDINGTON

I am afraid not. I am most
regretful but there is nothing that
can be done.

Mr Waddington holds out his hand to the Chaplain

MR WADDINGTON (CONT'D)

My condolences to the family and I
wish you a very pleasant journey
back to Dorset.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA sits forlorn. She stands as she sees and HEARS the
cell door unlock and open. The dark outline of THE CHAPLAIN
with a solemn expression stands in the doorway. They look at
each other.

CHAPLAIN

I am so sorry Martha, I did all I could but there is to be no reprieve.

MARTHA

Sir, I would have given the world not to have done it.

The Chaplain lowers his eyes

MARTHA (CONT'D)

Well no matter now, I must face the consequences and in fact I'm glad, for this, life matters not to me anymore.

INT. PRISON CELL - DAY

MARTHA stands still and composed. EMELIA helps Martha into a black silk dress.

MARTHA

I purchased this dress for John's funeral.

EMELIA

'Tis beautiful Martha.

THE CHAPLAIN arrives and stands in the doorway.

MARTHA

Sir, I am ready to be with my darling loved ones again.

CHAPLAIN

God bless you Martha.

MARTHA

You are sure that I will see my loved ones again, absolutely sure?

CHAPLAIN

This very day.

MARTHA

(dreamily)

I will be with my children, my darling children in paradise?

CHAPLAIN

Yes.

MARTHA

William, Thomas, James.

CHAPLAIN

Yes.

MARTHA

I am ready. I did love him you know.

EXT. THE PRISON GATES- DAY

The death bell TOLLS. THE UNDER SHERIFF, THE SHERIFF, OFFICERS, The CHAPLAIN and EMELIA escort MARTHA who looks beautiful, dignified and composed, out of the prison. She has her hands tied in front of her. Martha is talking to the CHAPLAIN and making gestures of prayer.

EXT. ROAD - DAY

Tree lined and crowded with 3,000 ONLOOKERS, all ages and all classes, THE PROCESSION walks along. MARTHA looks composed and resigned to her fate.

Sitting in a tree watching is THE YOUNG THOMAS HARDY, (poet and novelist) 15, eager and fascinated.

ANN, JACK and MARY ANN, THE BROWN FAMILY, The DAMONS, ELIZA, SETH AND JOSHUA and MARY DAVIS, EZEKIEL, THE SYMES BROTHERS are all in the crowd. Martha looks at their faces as she passes by.

A misty early morning rain is falling.

EXT. THE SCAFFOLD PLATFORM - DAY

MARTHA calmly ascends the steps. High on a platform, WILLIAM CALCRAFT, mid 50 s, indifferent look, draws a thin white cloth hood over Martha's face, ties her long dress at her ankles and places the rope around her neck and over the beam.

There is a THUD.

Martha's wet black silk dress clings to her body. She swings gently.

The black flag above the prison also hangs limp, sodden by the rain.

FADE OUT:

THE END