

Scene 1

Front Of House. The MINSTREL enters and wanders along the aisle reciting the opening verses of 'The Little Gest of Robin Hood' (A medieval ballad from which the legend of Robin Hood is believed to have originated. More details of this at the end of the manuscript.) He recites it to a musical accompaniment, a plucked instrument or a flute.

He heads slowly towards LISTENER 1 and LISTENER 2 who are sitting below the stage dressed in medieval costumes. (They stay there throughout the entire play).

MINSTREL Pray listen all ye gentle folk
that be of freeborn blood
I shall tell ye of a good yeoman
his name is Robin Hood

Robin is a proud outlaw
that e'er walked on ground
So courteous a thief as he
Was truly never found

Now Robin stood in Barnsdale
And leaned him to a tree
And by him stood there Little John
A good yeoman was he.

And also did good Scarlett
and Much, the miller's son
In every inch of body
Was worthier but none

The MINSTREL stops by the LISTENERS and waits for payment.

LISTENER 1 (To LISTENER 2) Another ballad about some outlaw.

LISTENER 2 Aye, 'tis the Little Gest (*pronounced 'jest'*) of Robin Hood. They say this outlaw robs the rich and helps the poor. Throw him a farthing husband.

LISTENER 1 He's certainly helping this poor minstrel. Here!

LISTENER 1 throws a coin which lands at the MINSTREL'S feet. He gathers it and exits reciting the next verse which fades out before the end.

MINSTREL Then spoke thus Little John
all unto Robin Hood,
"Master, if you would dine soon
It'd do ye a lot of good ... (*fade*)

The MINSTREL exits.

Scene 2

Stage Apron centre stands a dividing screen at right-angle to the audience. It represents a confessional, one side of which sits the PRIEST. GILBERT enters and kneels in front of the other side. There is a pause before the priest speaks.

PRIEST Perhaps we can start by confessing how long it is since we have been to confession? *(Pause)* I'm listening?

GILBERT Er ...

PRIEST You're the swine keeper's lad aren't you?

GILBERT Yes, Gilbert.

PRIEST Yes, it is a long time since I recall having the unpleasant task of listening to your sins.

GILBERT Sorry.

PRIEST Oh don't apologise to me. *(Points upwards)* It's Him up there whose mercy you should be seeking, for He, is the ultimate forgiver of sin. The one who decides on whether you will be fit to enter His kingdom or whether, God forbid, you will spend eternity *(points downwards)* stoking up the fires of that damned place below.

Pause.

PRIEST Well - I'm listening? First sin - get it over with then?

GILBERT I haven't been to confession for a long time.

PRIEST Yes yes, we've already established that. Next.

GILBERT *gets up to leave.*

PRIEST Where are you going?

GILBERT Er - you just said "next".

PRIEST Get back on your knees you fool. If you honoured us with your presence more often, you would know that by "next", I mean that I want to hear your next sin. Not the next sinner. *(Pause)* Well - I'm listening?

GILBERT Er - I stole some apples.

PRIEST *(A sigh of disappointment)* Yes.

Pause, followed by a nervous cough from GILBERT .

GILBERT And some pears .

PRIEST Tsk tsk tsk! Go on, I'm listening.

GILBERT And cherries ...

PRIEST Yes all right, you've stolen some things. What else?

GILBERT I told lies.

PRIEST What kind of lies? (*Bored*). Go on, I'm listening.

GILBERT Er ... well ... er ...

Another pause as GILBERT thinks.

PRIEST I am your confessor, you understand? You can - nay you must - tell me everything you have done. Even every bad and impure thought that has entered your head. You might be able to hide them from me, but not from (*pointing upwards*) Him. He, is watching and sees everything. And you know what awaits those who try and hide their sins from (*points upwards*), Him?

GILBERT But - if he can see everything we do, then why do we have to tell him what he already knows?

PRIEST Because ... he wants to be sure that you, have seen the error of your ways. Ours is not to reason why.

GILBERT Why?

PRIEST (*With suppressed annoyance*) I said it's not to reason. Just get on with it lad, you must have done more wrong than you have already confessed to. What about thoughts then, eh? Perhaps you have had some bad, impure thoughts eh? I'm listening.

GILBERT Er ... well, I, I suppose I have had some bad and impure thoughts.

PRIEST Oh yes? What kind of bad and impure thoughts were these then? Go on, I'm listening?

GILBERT Er ... well ...

Pause.

PRIEST About someone?

GILBERT Yes.

PRIEST A girl - perhaps?

GILBERT Er - yes.

PRIEST I see. What was the result of these bad and impure thoughts?

Pause.

PRIEST Remember, He is watching you. He sees everything you do. This kind of behaviour is bad for you. How many can you count up to?

GILBERT Only ten.

PRIEST You will say ten Hail Marys for your sins.

GILBERT Thank you

PRIEST How old are you?

GILBERT Nineteen.

PRIEST When will you be twenty?

GILBERT Next November.

PRIEST So, you can count up to twenty then. That will be another ninety Hail Marys for telling more lies, which makes a hundred. Do you have a rosary?

GILBERT Er - I've lost it!

PRIEST Then use your fingers. You can do something useful with your hands for a change. *(He makes the sign of the cross as he gives absolution)*
Ne sacerdos revelet confessionem. Nullus ira, vel odio, vel Ecclesiae metu vel mortis in aliquo, audeat revelare confessiones. Amen.

GILBERT crosses himself, gets up and exits.

ELIZABETH enters and kneels in front of screen.

PRIEST Yes my child? I'm listening!

ELIZABETH I have nothing to confess to father.

PRIEST Good! God bless you my child. I will say ten Hail Marys on your behalf and pray that you stay as pure as our Virgin lady. And my child, you have reached an age when young men must enter your thoughts. Take my advice and stay well clear of that swinekeeper's lad. He keeps impure thoughts in his head.

ELIZABETH How do you know father?

PRIEST He told me ... (*Embarrassed that he's been caught out*) er ... I ... er ... know his type. Now, go forth in peace. (*He makes the sign of the cross as he gives absolution*) Ne sacerdos revelet confessionem. Nullus ira, vel odio, vel Ecclesiae metu vel mortis in aliquo, audeat revelare confessiones.

ELIZABETH crosses herself and exits.

Scene 3

Front Of House. The MINSTREL re-appears wandering along the aisle reciting more verses from 'The Little Gest of Robin Hood'. He walks towards LISTENER 1 and LISTENER 2.

MINSTREL Then spoke hungrily Robin,
"To dine I have no wish,
Till I have some bold baron
Or some unknown guest.

"Till I have some rich abbot
That can pay for the best,
Some wealthy knight or squire
That lives here in the west."

Right habits then had Robin
In the land where he stayed.
Everyday before he ate
Three prayers would he say.

One worship of the Father
One of the Holy Ghost
The third of Our Dear Lady
That he loved the most.

The MINSTREL stops by the LISTENERS and waits for payment.

LISTENER 1 (*To LISTENER 2*) So this Robin Hood robs people and then prays for forgiveness?

LISTENER 2 Aye. So he can carry out his next robbery with a clean soul and a clear conscience. They say he is especially kind to women. Throw the minstrel another farthing husband.

LISTENER 1 throws a coin which lands at the MINSTREL'S feet. He gathers it and exits reciting the next verse which fades out before the end.

MINSTREL Good Robin loves Our Lady
For fear of deadly sin
He never would do any harm
That some woman was in ... *(fade)*

The MINSTREL exits.

Scene 4

GILBERT enters stage apron and stops. He is obviously waiting for someone. ELIZABETH enters, sees him and stops. He pretends he hasn't seen her.

ELIZABETH Gilbert!

GILBERT *(Feigning surprise)* Oh ... Elizabeth ... it's you! Greetings.

ELIZABETH I've been looking for you.

GILBERT *(Excited)* F - for me?

ELIZABETH Yes, your pigs have wandered into our field. Father became angry and told me to go and tell you. Can you please go and get them out?

GILBERT Well - I've got to go and see the thatcher first. Then, I'll get them out. Er - I've just been to confession.

ELIZABETH Yes I saw you there. You were in with the priest a long time. What have you been up to?

GILBERT Oh, nothing really!

ELIZABETH Nothing? You were obviously confessing to having done something wrong.

GILBERT Well, I haven't been to confession for a long time. Because, I have nothing to confess to, apart from stealing some fruit. But you know the priest, he virtually forced me to confess to other sins that I haven't committed.

ELIZABETH And what other sins did you confess to?

GILBERT Er ... oh ... just ... impure thoughts ... about girls. I haven't really had any impure thoughts of course. I just said I had, to get out of there.

ELIZABETH I see.

GILBERT Of course that doesn't mean I don't think about girls. Sometimes.

ELIZABETH Oh? And which girls do you think about then?

GILBERT Um ... well ... er ... you, sometimes.

ELIZABETH You've had thoughts about me Gilbert? And what, were you thinking about me?

GILBERT Um ... well ... er ... I ... I ... think you're very attractive Elizabeth. But my thoughts were not impure of course.

ELIZABETH I should hope not. If you had any designs on me Gilbert, I must tell you that I am about to be betrothed.

GILBERT B - betrothed? To who?

ELIZABETH Ralph Butcher. His wife died several years ago and my father thinks I would make an excellent replacement.

GILBERT But Ralph is old enough to be your father Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH He's forty four, but he's not bad looking. My father says there is no one else who is eligible.

GILBERT I'm eligible, and I'm only nineteen.

ELIZABETH I'm sorry Gilbert, but my father would not want me to marry a swineherd. He wants the very best for me, and Ralph has carved a very good position for himself, with the Sheriff of Nottingham's guard. He has just won promotion to commander ...

Enter RALPH .

RALPH Ah Elizabeth, I've been looking for you.

ELIZABETH Ralph! We were just talking about you.

RALPH What were you saying about me?

ELIZABETH I was just telling Gilbert about your promotion to Commander.

RALPH Captain! Your father wants to see you.

ELIZABETH What about?

RALPH About us.

ELIZABETH What about us?

RALPH You know what I'm talking about. My proposal. *(To GILBERT)* On your way lad. Back to your pigs.

GILBERT I'm talking to Elizabeth.

RALPH I said on your way!

ELIZABETH There's no need to talk to Gilbert like that Ralph. He's my dear friend.

RALPH Dear friend? A swineherd? No future wife of mine is going to call a swineherd her dear friend. *(To GILBERT)* Go on - be off!

GILBERT I won't always be a swineherd.

RALPH Oh yes? And what lofty position do you aspire to then? A shepherd? Or perhaps even a robber? Waylaying rich travellers along the Great North Road through Sherwood Forest. That, seems to be a popular occupation among your lowest classes around here.

GILBERT Yes and some of them have done very well out of it.

RALPH Huh! And some not so well. I had the pleasure of hanging one of them only last year.

GILBERT What about Robin Hood then? Why haven't you hanged him? They say he and his gang live in Sherwood Forest now, not up in Barnsdale.

RALPH We'll catch him, it's just a matter of time. And when we do, he'll hang in Nottingham market for the birds to feed on.

GILBERT You'll never catch Robin Hood. He killed the last Sherrif of Nottingham!

RALPH Yes, well that Sherrif wasn't so well protected, he didn't have me. But I'll catch that murderer. In fact - I almost did once.

ELIZABETH You nearly caught Robin Hood, Ralph? When?

RALPH Ooh - it was the year before last, during St. Swithin. The whole gang took over an ale house out on the edge of Sherwood Forest. Thought they'd be safe there, but my spies tell me everything. I soon had the place surrounded and then I burst in. We had them cornered like rats.

ELIZABETH What, and all his men as well? Little John, Will Scarlett ...?

RALPH Yes - they were all there, the whole damned pack.

ELIZABETH You said you almost captured them. What happened next?

RALPH The place was crowded and they escaped in the confusion. But they won't be returning to that tavern again. I had it burned to the ground.

ELIZABETH You must admit though Ralph, they are so brave and clever, are Robin Hood and his men.

RALPH Brave? They are just common robbers and murderers. And clever? They've just been damned lucky that's all. You've been listening to these ridiculous ballads, completely made up. Probably by his own gang.

Enter WALTER, very angry at GILBERT.

WALTER What in the name of hell are you doing boy? Those pigs have got out and are wandering all over the village. And where's that thatcher? I sent you out to fetch him this morning, where is he?

GILBERT I haven't been yet.

WALTER You haven't been yet?

ELIZABETH He's been to confession master Walter

WALTER Confession? What all morning? What have you done?

GILBERT Nothing.

WALTER So you went to confess nothing. Hell, it's a long time since I've given you a damned good belting. *(Raising his fist)* And you're still not too big for that yet ...

RALPH Curb your language and steady your hand sir! You're not with your pigs now.

WALTER *(To GILBERT)* Go on, get down to the thatcher.

GILBERT I'm not going to the thatcher. And I'm not coming home.

WALTER Not coming home? Why, where are you going then?

GILBERT starts to exit stage right.

GILBERT I don't know. Sherwood Forest to join Robin Hood's gang, maybe. Anywhere, but away from here.

WALTER *(Shouting after GILBERT)* That's it, go off and leave me then. With the pigs, and your mother!

All exit.

Scene 5

Front Of House. Enter the MINSTREL reciting more verses from 'The Little Gest Of Robin Hood'. He wends his way down towards the LISTENERS.

MINSTREL Then Little John did greet him
And got down on his knee.
“Welcome ye gentle knight
Welcome are ye to me.

“Sir, welcome to the greenwood,
Young fellow, knight and free.
My master waits for you here,
All of these hours three.”

When asked “Who is thy master?”
John said, “It’s Robin Hood.”
The Knight said “He’s a good man,
“Of him I’ve heard much good.

“I grant” said he “to go with you,
My brothers, all together.
Though I had planned to dine today
At Blythe or Duncaster.”

The MINSTREL stops by the LISTENERS and waits for payment.

LISTENER 1 (To LISTENER 2) This Robin Hood is good to the strangers he
waylays?

LISTENER 2 They say he feeds them well. But if they are rich, he then makes them
pay equally well for the privelage of having dined with him. I think this
fellow looks like he could do with a good feed. Husband, throw him a
farthing.

*LISTENER 1 throws a coin which lands at the MINSTREL'S feet. He gathers it and
exits reciting the next verse which fades out before the end.*

MINSTREL So forth then went this gentle knight
In some sorrowful state.
The tears flowed from his eyes
And ran all down his face ... *(fade)*

The MINSTREL exits.

Scene 6

*The main room in Walter and Agatha's cottage. AGATHA is sweeping the floor.
WALTER is offstage in an outroom trying to move his bowels.*

AGATHA Haven't you finished out there yet?

WALTER *(OFF)* I haven't even started.

AGATHA You should eat more fruit and vegetables and less pork. And drink less ale too. If you did that, you wouldn't be having these problems and spending half the day out there sitting on that bucket. You could go outside like normal people do, and get it over and done with before you freeze to death.

WALTER *(OFF)* Rubbish!

AGATHA Exactly! You eat too much of it and that's why you suffer from constipation. Not to mention gout. I never have these problems.