

Theatre Alibi with Exeter Northcott Theatre & Oxford Playhouse

The Crowstarver

From the book by **Dick King-Smith**
Adapted by Daniel Jamieson

FOR EDUCATIONAL USE ONLY

SCENE 1 FINDING THE LAMB

(The storytellers approach the stage in the moonlight.)

- St. 1 The sough of the wind,
St. 2 ...coming over the shoulder of the Wiltshire downs,
St. 3 ...sweeping low across a lambing field...
St. 4 ...'til it meets a stout, stone wall...
St. 5 ... - the lambing pen on Outoverdown Farm.
St. 1 Inside this, ewes and their new lambs,

(Some storytellers make the crying of the lambs and the guttural reply of the ewes.)

- St. 5 ...and the shepherd's hut, safe from the west wind's buffeting. **(St. 5 has fetched a box with an opening like a little window in the side, through which a warm light glows. St. 5 draws a hurricane lamp out of the box and holds it over the scene. St. 4 pulls a lamb and a teated flagon out of the box. He becomes Tom Sparrow, feeding the lamb.)**
- St. 5 Inside the hut, a shepherd, Tom Sparrow, feeding a motherless lamb.
- Tom Enough? **(Bleat.)** Sure? **(Bleat.)** Go on then... **(He lays the lamb in the box and settles down to sleep beside it.)**
- St. 3 Tom's dog, Molly.
- Tom Sweet dreams Molly. **(Tom pats Molly's head and she lays her head on her paws, wagging her tail slightly.)**
- St. 3 They snatched what sleep they could at lambing time. All quiet now. Everything in its place.
- St. 2 Wait. **(St. 1 has slipped away and approaches now with a shawl round her head, carrying a bundle.)** Along the drove from the valley road a girl comes, striving against the wind, carrying a bundle.

(She comes onstage and goes out of view into a pen upstage then backs out without the bundle. She hesitates a moment then heads off the way she came.)

- St. 2 And off again, arms empty.

(St. 2 looks down into the pen and makes the thin wailing that comes from the bundle. Molly hears the noise straightaway.)

Tom What's up Molly? Fox about is there? **(He puts on his coat, takes the lamp and goes out the door. The noise of the wind and the wailing are louder now. Molly runs ahead and barks into the pen, wagging her tail. Tom hangs the lantern and picks up the bundle, a dirty white shawl, from which the crying comes. He takes the lantern and returns to the hut with the bundle. All the storytellers and Molly crowd round Tom as he sits and opens the bundle. It's a baby. Tom holds him up, turning him this way and that, examining him as he would a new lamb.)** You're a poor little rat, you are, my lad...
(The baby cries louder. Tom hold him close and cuddles him. There's a note in the shawl, which Tom sees now and reads, then stuffs in his pocket with a shake of his head.)
Looks like your mum's ditched you.
(He reaches for the lamb's bottle. The lamb bleats from its box expectantly.)
Wait your turn.
(After a cursory wipe of the teat, he feeds the baby with the bottle.)
Come on, get it down you, there's a good boy...
Ah dear, Molly, I shoulda loved a son.

(A storyteller has slipped away and approaches now as Kathie Sparrow.)

St. 5 Kathie Sparrow comes up the drove now - Tom's wife, bringing his breakfast. Lambing time is a lonely time for her, with no child for company. **(She stops and looks around before going in to the hut.)**

Kathie Oh Tom. **(She goes in and sees Tom with the baby.)** Tom! **(He hands her the note. She reads it out loud.)** "PLEASE SAVE THIS LAMB"... **(Kath takes the baby from Tom and gently embraces it, then they walk away down to their cottage.)**

SCENE 2 BREAKING NEWS

St. By the next day everyone on Outoverdown Farm and in the village knew that the Sparrows were looking after an abandoned baby.

(One storyteller fetches a hat and broom and becomes Ephraim, sweeping the stable. The other becomes Percy Pound.)

Ephraim **(Sweeping,)** ...The mother must be one o' they girls from town. Father prob'ly one o' they squaddies...

Percy **(Easing his bad leg, looking at his pocket watch,)** Hmmm.
Daresay.

(Billy Butt enters, unrepentantly late.)

Billy Mornin'.

Percy You'm late.

Billy Come day, go day, God send Sunday, if ever I come through
theseyer door of a morning and you baint led on old Flower's
backside, and your old watch bain't five minutes fast then the natural
world as we knows it will have come to an end.

Percy You'm late! Now. You'll be fencing up at the Far Hanging today. Take
the Scotch cart an' all the things you need. Eph, I want you to go up
to the lambing pen and give Tom a hand. He's been a bit busy at the
moment, one way or another.

Billy I never heerd tell o' such a thing. Boy-child, missus says. "Poor little
bastard," I says to her.
"Billy!" she says, "your language!"
"That's what he is," I says, "a bastard, no messin'." What do you
reckon Percy? Tom and Kathie be let keep un?

Percy Depends. The mother might come back I s'pose.

Ephraim Never. **(The other two look at him.)**

Billy Does Mrs Yorke know?

Percy Yes. If Tom and Kathie decide to adopt the babbie, good luck to 'em,
she said.

Billy What they going to call him?

Percy I got no idea, but I know what I'm going to call you if you don't get to
work. Go on...
(He watches them go then rubs his knee.)

St. Percy Pound, the farm foreman. German shell fragment smashed
that knee in the Battle of the Somme, 1916. Ten years ago now, but
it still hurts, which is why he's bad-tempered sometimes.

**(Percy limps across the stage and knocks on a door with his stick. Kathie
answers the door carrying the baby.)**

Percy Morning Kath. How's it going then? Anything we can do to help?

Kathie It's alright thanks Percy.

(Percy looks at the baby.)

St. No beauty, he thought.

Kathie He's beautiful isn't he?

Percy ...What you going to call him then?

Kathie Well, Tom wants to call him John after his old dad and I want to call him Joe after mine.

Percy You'll have to toss for it then.

Kathie Don't know as we'll be let keep him. After all, tisn't as though he's a normal baby.

Percy Not normal? What do you mean?

Kathie I mean, we don't know who he belongs to.

SCENE 3 MAKING A NEW FRIEND

(A two and a half year old child scuttles round on all fours, keeping his knees up off the ground, playing with a ball. Kath takes in some washing. Tom hoes his cabbage patch.)

St. John Joseph Sparrow,

St. ...rather more than two years later, and still no signs of him walking.

St. But he got about smartly enough.

St. Kathie and Tom had finally been able to adopt him.

(Tom tickles Spider and he laughs.)

Kathie Spider!

St. Everyone called him that now, because of his peculiar way of crawling.

(Spider crawls to Kathie's feet and looks up at her.)

Kathie Who's a good boy?

Spider **(Prodding himself in the chest,)** Good un!

St. At almost two and a half, that's all he said.

St. Tom and Kath both worried.

(Kathie carries Spider to Tom who stops work and leans on his hoe.)

Kathie It's time for his bed. Say goodnight to your dad, Spider.

Spider Good un!

Kathie You and your "good un". Say good *night*, there's a good boy.

Spider Good un!

Tom Sleep well my son.

Kathie Goodnight my love.

Tom Pleasant dreams.

Kathie I suppose he does dream. He sleeps so sound. I don't think he's ever woke us.

Tom He's contented, that's why.

(Tom gets into bed. Kath joins Tom. He soon begins to snore, but she lies awake. Outside, an owl hoots.)

St. It was some time in the small hours when Kath heard that old owl, out on his usual perch in the apple tree at the bottom of the garden.

(Unseen by Kath, Spider sits up in his cot and hoots loudly in a perfect imitation, then lies down again. Kath sits up sharply, puzzled. She gets out of bed and goes to his cot. He's fast asleep again. Kath returns to bed and sits.)

Kath Must've dreamt it.

(Morning comes. Tom gets up, stretches, yawns, splashes water on his face and puts on his hat. Kath gets Spider out of his cot. He babbles happily.)

Spider Good un...

Kathie Bye dear. **(Tom kisses her and pinches Spider's cheek, copying his babble.)**

Spider Good un.

Tom Good un! Come on Molly.

(Molly barks and goes with Tom. Kathie puts Spider down and he plays happily. She puts more washing out.)

St. Kathie saw a cuckoo fly across the nearby field.

St. **(Making the call of the cuckoo,)** Cuckoo. Cuckoo. **(Pause.)**

Spider Cuckoo! **(Kath looks at him in surprise.)** Cuckoo!

Kathie Spider! It was you last night then!

Spider Good un!

Kathie There's clever you are! Maybe I'm wrong. Maybe you'll be cleverer than the other children...

(A storyteller becomes a cat.)

St. The Sparrows' neighbours had a big old ginger tom that sometimes paid a visit.

Cat Miaouw.

Spider Miaouw! **(The cat looks at him.)**

Cat Miaouw.

(Kath watches transfixed. Suddenly the cat jumps down and runs towards Spider.)

Kathie Spider! **(She rushes over to save Spider, but finds the cat nuzzling his face, purring loudly.)** Spider? **(At her voice, the cat runs away. She picks up Spider, who purrs loudly. She kisses him and puts him back in his cot. Tom comes home.)**

Kathie ...I couldn't believe my ears. He had all those different sounds exactly.

Tom Well I never. And he weren't frightened of that old cat then?

Kathie No!

Tom Just as well he is fond of animals if he's going to work on the farm.

Kathie He might not, you never know, he might learn a trade, go to work in town perhaps... **(Pause. Tom reckons the moment's come to talk openly.)**

Tom Kath love. Let's be straight with one another, we always have. He's slow our Spider, isn't he now?

Kathie He'll catch up. Look how clever he is making all those noises.
(Pause.) Oh Tom...

Tom We ought to look on the bright side. He's healthy and he's happy.

Kathie You never know, we might be wrong! No-one in the village has said anything to me. Have the farm men said anything to you?

Tom No...

(Percy Pound, Billy Butt and Ephraim gather in the stable for the days orders. Ephraim brushes a horse. Billy goes on, as usual.)

Billy ...Same as I told the missus, Tom and Kathie'd been better off without un. Why, if that had been a lamb as wasn't right, Tom would have knocked 'ee on the head, theest know. I bain't sayin' he shoulda done that to the babbie, but he ought to have let un fade away.

Ephraim Not for my money Billy. I reckon Tom done right.

Percy **(Angry,)** And so do I. And I'm telling you two, you keep your mouths shut about that kid. If I hear anyone's been poking fun so Kath and Tom gets to hear of it, you'll get your cards, understand?

Billy/Eph. Ar. Etc. **(They disperse.)**

SCENE 4 FIRST DAY AT SCHOOL

St. The years passed and it was lambing time again on Outoverdown Farm.

(Kathie walks on, then turns back and beckons.)

Kathie Spider! Come on. We'll be late.

(He walks to her.)

St. It was also John Joseph Sparrow's sixth birthday, so quickly does time fly.

(Kathie neatens his hair fondly. A flock of lapwings lifts out of a nearby field with mournful cries.)

Spider Peewit! Peewit!

Kathie That's right!

Spider **(Pointing to himself,)** Good un!

Kathie Yes.

(Mrs Yorke rides up on her horse.)

Spider Missus!

St. Mrs Yorke, the owner of Outoverdown. She'd run the farm alone since her husband died in the Great War.

Mrs Yorke Good morning Mrs Sparrow!

Kathie Morning ma'am.

Mrs Y And young Master Sparrow! At last we meet! **(Spider hides bashfully behind Kath.)**

Kathie It's his birthday ma'am.

Mrs Y Tell me, young man, how old are you now?

Kathie Spider, show Mrs Yorke how old you are. **(Spider shyly holds up the fingers and thumb of one hand.)** That's five love. That's what you were yesterday. Today you're six. Remember? **(She holds up six fingers. He copies and looks at his fingers and thumbs as if they don't belong to him. Kathie speaks to Mrs Y,)** We're off up to the school to see Mr Pugh about him starting... **(Mrs Y can't help but watch Spider. It's dawning on her he's not normal.)**

Spider **(Jumping with excitement and pointing over a wall,)** Barrits!

Kathie Yes, rabbits! **(To Mrs Y,)** He loves animals. They seem to love him too.

Mrs Y No wonder.

Kathie We best be off. Mustn't be late for Mr Pugh.

Mrs Y Quite! Well, the best of British luck.

Kathie Spider, come along. Say goodbye to Mrs Yorke.

Spider Spider six!

Mrs Y So you are! Cheerio, my boy. **(They walk on their way. Mrs Y watches them go for a while. A storyteller makes the sound of a crow.)**

Spider Croaks!

Kathie Crows, yes. How many?

Spider Six?

Kathie No. Count them. Use your fingers.

(Spider lags behind, trying to count with his fingers. They pass two children.)

Child Hello Mrs Sparrow.

Kathie Hello Phillip. **(Spider passes them.)**

Child **(Imitating Spider's voice,)** Hullo Spider. **(The other laughs.)** "Good un!" **(They laugh more. Spider hurries by, instinctively wary, to catch up with his mother.)**
Good un'! Good un'!
(The children follow Spider, copying his walk. Kathie turns round. They stop copying.)

Kathie Spider!

(Kathie looks at them knowingly then takes Spider by the hand and goes into the school.)

Boy Ee'd have frightened Miss Muffet to death, ee would! **(They fall about laughing.)**

(Kathie and Spider are inside the playground now. Spider looks over-awed. Kathie pulls him closer and they go in to the schoolhouse. Mr Pugh sits marking. Kathie and Spider stand un-noticed for a moment before Mr Pugh comes round his desk to greet them.)

Mr Pugh Mrs Sparrow, and this must be John Joseph... **(He shakes their hands.)** Please, take a seat. I've heard such a lot about you, John. It's a pleasure to meet you at last.

Kathie Say hello Spider. **(He can say nothing.)** Spider's what we call him at home.

Mr Pugh I see. Now the vicar has told me something of his condition, but you'll understand, I wanted to meet him myself, to ascertain whether he'll fit in with us or not.

Kathie Yes.

Mr Pugh I'll ask him some questions if I may...

Kathie Please.

Mr Pugh Now then, young man. Let's see how much you know. **(He writes**

CAT in big letters on a slate and holds it up.) What does that say? **(No answer.)** Well, what does that letter say? **(Nothing.)** How about that one? **(Spider looks at his mum as if to say, “Take me away.”)** No? Never mind. Let me see... **(He opens an illustrated encyclopaedia and shows Spider a picture.)** What do you see here? What’s going on? **(He flicks to another picture.)** What’s he doing? **(Nothing. He turns the pages and finds a picture of a rabbit.)** What’s that?

Spider **(Very quietly,)** Barrit.

Mr Pugh Can he write his name, Mrs Sparrow?

Kathie No.

Mr Pugh Does he know any numbers?

Kathie He knows how old he is.

Mr Pugh How old are you John? Spider? **(Spider is confused and holds up only five fingers.)**

Kathie He’s just six. **(There’s a pause while Mr Pugh chooses his words. Kathie nervously fills the gap.)** He’s ever so clever in some ways. He’s wonderful with animals, any sort of animal, and he can copy the noises they make to the life...

Mr Pugh Mrs Sparrow, it’s better if I’m frank with you. Your boy has got problems that I don’t think we can deal with. I’m sorry. **(He leaves. Kathie slumps, head down. Spider stands looking at her.)**

Spider Mum? Spider not go school? **(She looks at him and shakes her head.)** Good un! **(He looks so happy, she smiles and hugs him.)**

SCENE 5 NEIGHBOURS TALK

(Mrs Y and Percy stroll onto the stage, looking at cattle in a field. Storytellers make the mooing.)

Mrs Y A nice bunch these, Percy.

Percy Bull’s done his job, any road.

(Pause.)

Mrs Y I’ve been meaning to ask you Percy, you remember a few years back when Tom and Kathie Sparrow took on that abandoned baby?

Percy Course, ma'am.

Mrs Y Well I've just seen the child and he's half witted, no doubt about it.

Percy That's right.

Mrs Y Am I the last person in the valley to know?

Percy **(Smiling,)** Maybe there's a few o' those heifers as don't know yet...

Mrs Y Damn bad luck on the Sparrows.

Percy Ar. Sweet lad, though.

Mrs Y Yes. Very. Perhaps we could find him something to do on the farm when he's older, something simple.

Percy If you say so ma'am.

Mrs Y Yes, I think I do Percy!

SCENE 6 BAD BOYS

(Kathie is dressed for cleaning. She brings Spider into the garden and sits him with some shoes, a tin of shoe polish, a cloth and brush and shows him how to clean them.)

Kathie Think you can manage that?

Spider Yes mum.

Kathie I'm at the front cleaning windows if you want me. And try and keep the polish off your trousers.

Spider **(Already concentrating on liberally applying the polish,)** Yes mum. **(She slips some newspaper on to his lap, under the boot, and goes off to clean windows.)**

St. Spider was ten now. Kathie didn't keep as sharp an eye on him as she used to.

(We see three schoolboys creep up outside the garden wall. They giggle and pull brown sacks over their heads roughly drawn with the faces of dogs. One of them peeps round the wall and barks once at Spider then ducks out of sight. Spider looks over. The boy barks again.)

Spider Mum? Dog's barking...

(Spider goes to investigate. Now we see the view from outside the wall. The three boys crawl backwards. Spider comes round the corner without seeing the boys. They circle behind him stealthily and block his route back to his house. One of the boys barks again. Spider turns and sees them. He goes to run past them but they fan out, better to block his path.) Mum? Mum! (The boys start to growl like dogs. Spider backs away. Suddenly one of them barks loudly. Spider cries out with fear. They all start barking. Spider runs away.)

Boy 1 Come on... get after 'im!

Boy 2 Tally ho!

Boy 3 Tally ho! **(They all run off after Spider like a pack of hounds. There's silence on stage for a moment or two before we hear Kathie's voice approaching.)**

Kathie Have you finished love? Spider? 'Cause I've got your father's for you to do, too... **(She comes into the garden to find him gone.)**
Spider? **(She listens for an answer.)** Spider? **(Listens again. Nothing. She gets her hat and coat and sets off to look for him.)**

(Spider runs on, panting, and falls exhausted. The boys bay out of sight, then appear and encircle Spider, coming closer. Spider doesn't know which way to turn.)

Spider Want go home please.

(One of the boys pushes Spider over from behind. He gets up. Another pushes him over. He gets up again and the third pushes him over. Spider doesn't get up this time. The boys close in on him now, pretending to be hounds, tearing at him, ripping his clothes. Spider cries. One of the boys looks round and spots a cowpat.)

Boy 1 'Ere! Cowpat! **(They drag Spider over and push his face into it.)**
'Ow's that then? Good un!

Boy 2/Boy 3 Good un! Good un!

(Spider gets up and stumbles about, unable to see properly. Boy 1 fetches a stick to hit Spider but Boy 2 stops him.)

Boy 2 What you doing?

Boy 1 Gonna whack 'im!

Boy 3 Don't be daft.

Boy 2 Nobody said anything about whackin' 'im...

Boy 1 Where is ee? **(They look round. Spider has escaped. They take off their masks.)**

Boy 2 I'm going 'ome.

Boy 3 Me too. **(Boy 2 & 3 hide their masks before running away.)**

Boy 1 Chickens! ...Chickens! **(He smacks the ground with his stick and runs off home too, throwing his mask over a hedge.)**

(Kath comes home, calling in exasperation one last time at the back door before going inside and taking off her hat and coat.)

Kath Spider! It's teatime. Where are you? **(She sits to think for a moment. Suddenly she hears a little noise in the corner from under a table.)** Spider? Is that you? **(She crouches and sees him hiding.)** What's the matter? It's alright dear. **(She pulls him out gently.)** Good God... what happened? **(Spider crawls out and kneels, shivering.)**

Spider Sorry mum, sorry. Bad boys. Bad boys.

Kathie Boys did this? Spider? Boys hurt you?

Spider Bad boys.

Kathie Who did this? Who? **(Kathie runs to the back door and screams with all her heart,) ANIMALS! (She comes back and hugs Spider, and weeps. Tom comes in now, back from work. He looks at them and seems to understand what's happened, almost to have anticipated it. He puts his arms round his family.)**

SCENE 7 A NEW WAR. A NEW JOB

St. Three years later, on the third of September 1939, Britain was forced once more to declare war on Germany. The only sons of both Mrs Yorke and Percy enlisted within the first few weeks.

(Percy and Mrs Y have come to stand and look at a field of winter wheat.)

Mrs Y Damn crows... **(Shouting at crows,) To Hell with you! (We hear the crows rise up.)** This is War Wheat! Whose side are you on? **(After a pause, she speaks to Percy.)** I wonder what they'll call this one.

Percy Beg pardon, ma'am?

Mrs Y This war. If the last was the "Great" war, what's this one?

Percy The next war, I s'pose. What's your boy signed up for ma'am?

Mrs Y The air force. Yours?

Percy Wiltshires.

Mrs Y Must we give our sons? When we've already given so much?
(Pause.) Sorry Percy.

Percy **(Making light,)** Poor young Albie Stanhope.

Mrs Y Ephraim's boy?

Percy Yes. Ee joined the Yeomanry for the horses and they went over to tanks the following week... **(They laugh. He shouts at the crows,)**
Clear off! **(We hear them rise up again.)**

Mrs Y It's no good Percy. If this wheat's to stand a chance, it needs someone to look after it.

Percy We're a bit short-handed without Albie, ma'am.

Mrs Y How old's the Sparrow's boy now?

Percy Spider? Thirteen, I reckon. Maybe a bit more.

Mrs Y Strong lad, is he?

Percy Well, he don't carry much flesh.

Mrs Y But it wouldn't be hard work, would it?

Percy I'll ask Tom, ma'am...

(Mrs Yorke goes off. Tom approaches.)

Tom Crowstarvin'?

Percy He could do that, couldn't he? Make a noise, shout and yell, bang on a bit of tin, keep the birds away?

(Percy goes off. Kathie approaches.)

Kathie Crowstarving? That's not much of a job, out in all weathers. He'll catch his death of cold and he'll be all on his own.

Tom He likes being on his own, Kath, you know that. He can't come to no harm, so long as you wrap him up warm.

Kath But crowstarving... He won't ever do that. He loves the birds.

(Kath goes off. Spider approaches.)

Tom Spider? How'd you like to work on the farm, like Dada does?

Spider Sheep?

Tom No. Looking after the corn. Your job'd be to frighten the birds away.

Spider **(Frowning,)** Spider frighten birds?

Tom Yes.

Spider Sparrows?

Tom No.

Spider Birdblacks?

Tom No. Croaks.

Spider Spider frighten croaks?

Tom You remember when those boys pushed you over? In the cow muck?

Spider Bad boys.

Tom Yes. Well now, the croaks are bad birds, stealing Mrs's corn. You're going to be a kind of a sojer, like Albie. He's gone to fight the Germans, you've got to frighten the croaks.

(Spider gets excited, hopping from foot to foot, swinging his arms.)

Spider Spider sojer?

Tom **(Nods.)** What d'you think?

Spider Good un!

SCENE 8 FIRST DAY ON THE JOB

(It's Spider's first day of work. Kathie dresses him in Tom's old army greatcoat that comes down to his ankles and pulls a thick balaclava over his head.)

Kathie Arms out... Arms down... This'll keep you warm.
(She puts a packet of sandwiches in his pocket.)
Lunch.

Kathie kisses him goodbye and Spider sets off with Tom. When Kathie's out of sight, Tom takes the balaclava off Spider.)

Tom Now. I got to go on up to see the lambs. Find Percy. He'll tell you what to do. **(Spider looks a bit nervous.)** You just do as your told and you won't come to no harm.

Spider Bye Dada.

Tom Have a good day, my boy. **(Spider hesitates.)** Go on! Come on Molly.

(Spider walks alone into the stable. Ephraim sees Spider.)

Ephraim Hello Spider. What you doing here?

Spider Croaks! Bad croaks! **(He flaps his arms.)**

Ephraim **(Bewildered,)** Right you are. **(Spider approaches Flower the cart horse.)** You want to be careful Spider. Old Flower, she don't like kids near her as a rule.

Spider Spider like horses.

Ephraim Well, don't say I didn't warn you. **(Spider goes to Flower and pats her, mumbling to her gently. The horse seems to enjoy the attention.)** Well I never...

Percy **(Coming in,)** Morning, Eph.

Ephraim Morning, Percy.

Percy Tom Sparrow's boy's starting today, crowstarving up at Mag's Corner.

Eph That what he's on about.

Percy Here already, is he?

Eph Ar, and I'll tell you something for nothing, he's either fearless or foolish.

(They both look at Spider, who's leant against Flower, whispering in her ear. Percy leans on Flower's rump in his habitual position and looks at his watch with a shake of his head. Billy comes in now.)

Billy Yur, 'tis brass monkey weather out there. I 'opes you got a nice warm job for me today Percy, I ain't so young as I was...

(Spider has been stood at Flower's head, out of sight. Now he comes and copies Percy, throwing an arm casually over her rump. Flower is quite unbothered. Billy, for once, is lost for words.)

Percy This is Tom and Kathie's boy. He's starting work today. Now I don't want anyone poking fun at him 'cause he doesn't speak too well. Spider, tell 'em what you're going to do today.

Spider Spider scare croaks!

(The farm men exit. Percy loads Spider up with a big bit of old tin and a metal bar, then throws his stiff leg over his motorbike and starts it up.)

Percy **(Patting the pillion,) Come on Spider. (Spider climbs on in a state of disbelief.) Hold tight! (They roar up the rough farm road. Spider yells with excitement. They arrive at a field, dismount and walk towards the gate. They can hear hundreds of crows happily feasting in the field.) Quiet ... Now then sojer, see all the bad birds down there, stealing Mrs Yorke's corn? (Spider nods.) Right then, up and at 'em!**

(Spider looks at the tin and bar, then at Percy, then at the crows before marching into the field, banging his piece of tin for all he's worth.)

Spider Gedoff croaks! Bad croaks! Bad uns! Bad uns! **(Spider crashes round joyfully, totally free. Percy leaves him to it and rides off on his motorbike. When Spider's finished he sits down to eat his lunch.)**

St. Crowstarving was the ideal job for Spider. All around him were animals of one sort or another.

(We hear wood pigeons. Spider replies with cooing.)

Spider Pigeons.
(Suddenly we hear all the wood pigeons lift off at once.) (Looking up,) Pigeons scared. (He looks down and is suddenly transfixed. A fox is standing there. It creeps closer and sits looking at Spider. They stay looking at each other a while then Spider breaks off a bit of his sandwich and holds it out, speaking softly,) Good un.

(Very slowly the fox approaches, closer and closer until it takes the food from Spider's very hand. It backs a few feet then delicately eats the bread. When it has finished it looks at Spider a few moments more before trotting away.)

St. The fox came again the next day and the next day and the day after that to share his bit of bread and cheese. They became friends of sorts, Spider and that fox.

(It starts to rain. Spider stands and looks at the sky, then at his coat as it soaks up the rain thirstily.)

SCENE 9 A PARENT'S WORRY

(Now Spider is at home. Kathie peels his soaking coat off him. Spider fetches a children's encyclopaedia of animals while Kathie and Tom talk.)

Kathie If it's weather like this tomorrow then he's not going out and you can tell Percy I said so.

(Spider finds a portrait of a fox and shows them excitedly.)

Spider Spider see!

Tom Saw a fox did you?

Spider Vox! Vox! Good un! **(Points at his mouth and makes a chewing movement.)**

Tom Eating summat, was it?

Spider Spider eat, vox eat. **(He mimes breaking off some bread and offering it to the fox.)**

Tom Shared your lunch with a fox! **(Spider nods vigorously.)**

Kath Honestly! Don't know what goes on inside his head sometimes!

Tom **(Laughing,)** Dunno what Mrs Yorke'd say! Only good fox for her is a dead one! **(Kathie shushes him and points at Spider.)**

Kath Anyway. He'll catch his death, standing about with no-where to shelter.

Tom All right, all right, I'll fix something up for him.

St. The next morning, Tom and Ephraim made a shelter for Spider. **(Ephraim joins Tom to make the shelter. Tom puts a crate inside for a seat. Molly runs in.)**

Tom Molly! There. Spider?! **(Spider runs up all excited.)**

Spider Spider's house?

Tom That's right! Show us what you're going to do then, if it's raining.

(Spider ducks in, sits on the crate and beams at the two of them. They know just

what he's going to say.)

Spider/Tom/Eph. Good un!

(Spider shuts the “door” to test out his shelter. Tom and Ephraim hear a pack of hounds in the distance, “...in full cry on a hot scent.” Molly Barks.)

Tom Shush Molly! Mrs Yorke'll be out with the hunt then.

Ephraim Oh ar - riding over someone else's land today. Mrs Yorke don't want em trampin' all over her precious corn.

(Suddenly the noise goes quiet.)

Tom Sounds like they got their fox, then. See you teatime Spider. **(Spider sticks his head out of the flap.)**

Spider Bye Dada!

Tom Come on Molly.

Ephraim See you Spider.

Spider Bye Eph.

(Tom and Ephraim go, taking Molly with them. Spider gets out his sandwiches, sits and waits expectantly.)

St. Spider waited for his fox to come and claim a share again. But he couldn't possibly know, the cry of the pack had stopped so suddenly because the hounds had caught and killed his friend.

SCENE 10 BAD NEWS

(Percy enters in his shirtsleeves and slippers. The storyteller has a telegram. Percy passes, carrying a tray of tea to his wife.)

St. On the 10th June 1940, Percy Pound and his wife received a telegram from the War Office.

(The storyteller puts the telegram through the letterbox. Percy knows what it is the moment he sees it. He slowly picks it up and reads it.)

St. It regretted to inform them that their only son had been killed in action during the retreat from Dunkirk.

(Tom, Mrs Yorke and Kathie stand in a line to offer their mumbled condolences. Percy walks past them in a daze, nodding in acknowledgement but without

being able to look at them. Spider is the last in line and smiles warmly, not appreciating the gravity of the situation.)

Spider Morning Percy!

Percy **(He looks at Spider.)** Morning Spider.

SCENE 11 PLANE CRASH

St. Harvest time came.

(The farm workers bring sheaves of wheat to a wagon and load them on. Spider arrives and gets in Ephraim's way.)

Percy Want to do something really helpful? **(Spider nods eagerly.)** Right then. Go down to the farm and get me a ball o' binder twine from the stable. Well come on you rabble, let's get this lot on the wagon **(Spider goes off. The men work in silence, lifting the sheaves up with forks and stacking them up high on the cart.)**

Storyteller It was a traditional English country scene as peaceful as could be...

(Suddenly there's the sound of two planes approaching low and fast, accompanied by blasts of machine-gun fire. The men stop and look.)

Ephraim Fighters!

Billy Oo's chasin' oo?

Ephraim I can't see... **(The planes pass close overhead.)** He's hit a German!

Billy One of our boys?

Ephraim Yes!

Ephraim/Billy Hooray!

Billy Hit a German?

Percy Yes. He's going down near the farm.

Ephraim Come on! Let's get him! **(Billy and Ephraim start to run.)**

Percy Steady. Be quicker on the tractor.

(Percy, Billy and Ephraim go off. Spider ambles on.)

St. Spider was half way down to the farm when he heard the planes.
(Noise of a plane high above. Spider looks up at it.) He saw one high above, twisting itself in a victory roll... **(Spider looks lower.)** Then he saw another coming over the shoulder of the hill quite silently, for its engine was dead. It was sweeping straight towards him...

(The plane passes just over Spider's head with a great whoosh, knocking him flat before skidding to a halt on its belly behind him. Spider picks himself up and watches as the pilot jumps out of the plane, unhurt, wondering what to do. Then the pilot hears voices coming and the tractor and runs away. Billy can be heard already, shouting offstage in his excitement. He has a pitchfork in his hands.)

Billy ...if so be 'ee's alive, old Billy'll soon put that right. Stick un right through his German guts I shall. **(He short-sightedly sees Spider standing by the plane.)** There! Lookzee, the bagger's alive! I'm going to stick this yer pick in thy arse!

Ephraim Bide quiet Billy. That's our Spider.

Billy Where be the pilot then?

Percy Dead in the cockpit maybe. No... it's empty.

Billy **(They arrive by Spider,)** Where is he then Spider? Didst see un? Where's he to?

Percy Steady Billy. Spider, did you see the man? **(Spider nods.)** Where'd he go?

Spider Spider's house.

Billy Come on then!

Percy Wait. He may be armed. It's no good rushing in there, mad headed. Keep behind me. **(They surround Spider's house. Percy stands opposite the entrance with the pitchfork poised.)** Eph, you go round the back in case he breaks that way. Take Billy with you. Come on Spider **(They fan out quietly. When everyone is in place, Percy shouts,)** Come out with your hands up! **(Silence.)** Hande hoch! **(Silence.)** Come out you murdering swine!

(Slowly the German pilot comes out of the shelter and puts up his hands. He smiles nervously.)

Pilot Ich ergebe mich kamerad... Bitte... Tun Sie mir nichts...

(Percy slowly lowers the pitchfork.)

Percy Dear God. He looks just like my son.

(Percy, Billy, Ephraim and Spider escort their prisoner off the stage.)

INTERVAL

St. The German pilot had been taken off that same afternoon to a prisoner-of-war camp near Salisbury. Once the wreckage was cleared away, all that remained of the crash was a scar on the grass where the plane had slithered to a halt. Life soon went on as best it could on Outoverdown Farm, in spite of the War.

Above all things, Mrs Yorke loved horses. One day, a most intriguing advertisement caught her eye...

Mrs Y **(Reading from her paper,)** "One American, "Bronco" Stallion to be sold at auction at Salisbury Market...

(Suddenly we are at the auction. Mrs Y stands and listens to the auctioneer.)

Auctioneer Lot twenty three, one American stallion. Tennenbaum's American Travelling Show is selling up and going home, but they're not going to the bother of shipping this fella back. He's a "bucking bronco", which means they used him in their rodeo show for young fools to fall off, so he's a bit wild but a good, strong horse. George, lets 'ave a look at 'im.

(There's a wild neighing and crashing offstage, then the horse drags George into the ring, rearing, bucking, turning, stamping, whinnying... George clings to the halter as long as he can, then is thrown to the ground and runs for his life.)

George Mother!

(The horse crashes back offstage. There's silence at the auction a second or two.)

Auctioneer There you have it ladies and gentlemen. A fine challenge for someone. Who will start the bidding for me at One guinea?
(Silence.) No? Ten shillings? Ten shillings? Five shillings...? Come on, you lot. Must be a home somewhere for this magnificent beast.
(Pause.) Shame to send him for cat meat...

Mrs Y I'll buy him!

Auctioneer **(Very quickly tapping his gavel,)** Sold then, to Mrs Yorke. **(Under his breath,)** And the best of luck to her...

St. When the haulier arrived at Outoverdown Farm with the horse, Mrs

Yorke was waiting with Ephraim at the bottom of the drove.

Mrs Y **(To the haulier,)** We're going to run him straight up onto our top pasture, let him blow off some steam for a while.

Ephraim For you to ride, is 'ee ma'am?

Mrs Y I don't know if I'll be riding him Ephraim. To tell you the truth, I felt sorry for him.

(All of a sudden the horse bursts out of the van, rears up and thunders off up the drove.)

Ephraim Ee's a bucking bronco alright ma'am.

Mrs Y Oh... he'll soon settle down.

(The bronco appears and grazes quietly a moment. Mrs Y and Ephraim creep up with a halter.)

Ephraim Good 'orse... Good 'orse... Good 'orse...

(Suddenly, the bronco notices them, rears and runs off like the wind.)

Ephraim I suppose we could run 'im into a tight spot and we might be able to handle him.

Mrs Y Corral him, like the cowboys in the movies!

Ephraim I wouldn't know about that ma'am. Only bin to the pictures once in Warminster, and that were Charlie Chaplin. The lambing pens'd be the place to hold 'im.

St. Mrs Yorke planned the whole operation with military precision.

Mrs Y ...Ephraim and I will drive him out of the Far Hanging on Em'ly and Jack. Billy will turn him down the drove, Tom and Percy will head him into the sheep pen at the bottom. All clear? Good luck!

(Everyone exits. After a moment's calm, there's an approaching hullabaloo before the bronco bursts on to the stage and circles as if finding itself closed in by Mrs Y and the farmworkers. Eventually the horse stops in a downstage corner, panting heavily, eyeing them with fear and fury. They breathe hard too, from the chase.)

Mrs Y Right, let's get a halter on him and we can tie him up.

(Silence. No-one comes forward.)

Billy Begging your pardon ma'am, when I were a young chap I might

have, but I bain't so quick on me feet as I was...

Mrs Y Come on, come on...

Billy I don't want to make our Martha a wider ma'am.

Ephraim Save thy breath Billy. This here's my job.
(Ephraim gathers himself then gingerly advances on the horse with a halter.)
Good 'orse... Good 'orse... Good 'orse...

(Suddenly it erupts in an explosion of wild movement and noise, bucking and neighing. Ephraim is knocked to the ground, and lies in imminent danger of being trampled. The bronco rears over him. Suddenly Spider is there in the enclosure and walks fearlessly towards the horse, which calms immediately. Ephraim scrambles for safety. Billy notices Spider now.)

Billy Spider...!

(Spider advances slowly, snickering softly to the horse until he stands right in front of it. It snickers back, still edgy. Gently, Spider brings his hand up to the horse's face. The horse sniffs Spider and he strokes his nose.)

Spider Good un. Good un. **(The horse tosses its head amicably with a gentle neigh.)**

Billy Well...that's summint y'don't see every day.

SCENE 12 WILD HORSE

St. So began quite a new routine for the Crowstarver.

(Spider goes into the pen with the horse, holding a rope halter at his side. He talks to him and makes comfortable horse noises. He also strokes and pats him.)

St. He always carried a rope halter, which he showed to the horse.

(He lets the horse see it, and sniff it, and he lays it against his neck.)

St. Until the day came when he was able to slip it over his head.

(Spider gently leads the horse round and round. Ephraim slips into the pen and surreptitiously they try to swap.)

St. At first he would only tolerate Ephraim if accompanied by

Spider...**(The horse kicks up until Spider returns and talks to the horse, patting Ephraim like he was another horse.)**

Spider Good 'un.

St. Before long, it became clear the wild horse was wild no longer.
(Ephraim leads the bronco round. Tom brings Spider to Mrs Yorke.)

Mrs Y Spider, I wanted to thank you for all the wonderful work you've done with that bronco. **(She opens a door just off stage and four droop-eared, long-tailed, ginger-haired puppies scurry on.)** Which one do you fancy, Spider? Take your pick.

Spider **(Not quite daring to understand, holding up four fingers,)** Four puppies.

Tom One of them is for you.

Spider For Spider?

Tom/Mrs Y Yes!

Tom Which one do you want? **(One of the dogs sits at Spider's feet, yapping and wagging her tail. Spider picks her up and rubs his cheek against her head. He's in love.)** Spider?

Spider Ta Missus! **(They laugh.)**

Mrs Y Quite alright, old chap. **(She goes. Kath enters. They're back home now.)**

Tom What are we going to call her then?

Kath Let Spider choose.

Tom We'll have to help him. Spider, puppy's got to have a name. **(To Kath,)** You start.

Kath How about... Bess?

(Spider shakes his head.)

Tom Nell?

(Spider shakes his head.)

Kath Lady?

(Spider shakes his head.)

Tom Princess?

(Spider shakes his head.)

Kath Gracie?

(Spider shakes his head.)

Tom Bonnie?

(Spider shakes his head.)

Kath Well what d'you want to call her Spider?

Spider Missus! Missus! **(Kath and Tom look at each other.)**

Kath That's nice love, but you can't call her Missus.

Tom How about... "Sissie"?

Spider **(Lighting up,) Sis-sie! Good un! Sis-sie! (Spider goes off happily with his dog.)**

Kath Sissie?!

Tom Don't worry. It'll soon shorten. I'll see to that.

SCENE 13 A NEW PET

Spider **(Spider enters with his crowstarving piece of tin to bash, looking offstage, calling,) Sis! Come! (He blows a whistle.)**

St. The summer of 1941 was, for Spider, the happiest time of his life so far.

Spider Good Sis! Where's stick? Find stick! **(Sis goes off to find a stick.)**

St. His happiness was almost wholly due to Sis.

(Sis comes back with the stick in her mouth for Spider to hit the tin with. Spider bangs and shouts, Sis barking and running in a wide circle chasing crows.)

Spider Sorry croaks.
(Spider sits for a rest. Sis is a long way off. As Spider watches her, a large hare lollops down just in front of him and lies happily in the grass. Spider crouches and looks at it,

mesmerised.)

Big barrit.

(Scenting Spider, the hare rises and begins to lope away upstage. Spider stands and watches the hare go off upstage. He watches it out of sight, then sees Sis running towards it in the distance.)

No! Sis, No!

(Sis runs onstage with the dead hare, drops it and backs off, leaving it for Spider, looking to him for approval. Spider takes up the hare, lays it along his arm and strokes it tenderly. It has been coming on darker for a while. Now there's a flash of lightning followed almost immediately by a rumble of thunder and the heavens open. Spider stands under the rain obliviously, but Sis is unnerved by the thunder. Spider carries the hare home in his arms. Sis follows close all the way, confused by her master's behaviour. By the time they get home, he and Sis are soaked and shivering. They come in to the cottage kitchen. Kathie is cooking. At first, she doesn't see the hare.)

Kath Spider, you must be soaked to the skin... **(Spider lays the hare on the kitchen table then sits before it, puts his head on his arms and weeps. Sis lies next to him, tilting her head, puzzled by the crying. Kath comes and sees the hare.)** Oh love. **(She puts her hand on his head. Gently she takes off his coat and fetches a towel to dry his head. Tom comes in from work, also soaked.)**

Tom Gwor. Coming down stair rods out there... What's up?

Kath I don't know. He just came in with that. **(Points at the hare.)**

Tom Dog must've killed it. **(He crouches and strokes Sis a moment.)**
Poor Sis. Anyone else would've been ever so proud of you.

Kath **(To Spider,)** It's alright love. You don't want to blame yourself, nor Sis. She only did what's natural to a dog. **(To Tom, whispering,)**
You best get that thing out of here.

Tom Wass want me to do with it?

Kath Just get rid of it, bury it, so he can't see it no more. **(Tom takes the hare offstage.)** Let me dry your hair love. **(Spider looks up. Kathie wipes his eyes and nose.)**

Spider Where's big barrit?

Kath Dada's going to bury it.

(Spider looks less miserable now the hare is out of his sight. Sis cheers up too and lays her head on his lap.)

Spider Sis killed big barrit, mum.

Kath I know. Twasn't your fault, twasn't her fault. Next time she goes after one, you blow your whistle and she'll come back. Go on love, you go and get some dry clothes on before tea. **(Spider and Sis go off. Tom comes in with red hands, peering round to check Spider's not there.)** Did you bury it?

Tom Some of it...The rest is in the larder.

Kath What if he asks what it is when he's eating it?

Tom He never does.

Kath But suppose he does?

Tom Tell him it's chicken.

Kath **(Suddenly desolate.)** What's to become of him when we're gone? How will he ever manage on his own?

Tom Come on love, we're not that old! **(He hugs her.)**

SCENE 14 MORE BAD NEWS

St. Next morning Spider had a nasty cough and a temperature and the doctor was called.

(The doctor arrives and spends some time listening to Spider's chest.)

Doctor **(To Kathie and Tom.)** I don't think you've got a lot to worry about. It's just a chill.

Tom He's never been ill in his life before.

Kath Bit short of breath sometimes, but never what you'd call ill.

Doctor **(Gathering himself to depart,)** You've obviously taken very good care of him. I best be off. A few more calls to make. Tom, what is your secret with those cabbages?

Kath I won't stay for cabbage talk. Goodbye Doctor.

Doctor Goodbye Mrs Sparrow. **(She goes inside, offstage. The two men look at each other.)**

Tom Tisn't cabbages you want to talk about, is it?

Doctor No Tom. I think it best you should know, your boy has a slight heart

problem. I didn't want to worry your wife with it, but he has what we call a heart murmur.

Tom Dear God...

Doctor It may be nothing to worry about. If he should show any symptoms of heart trouble in future, we can have a much more thorough look at him. I shouldn't worry your wife about it. Cheerio Tom. **(Tom doesn't reply for an instant.)** Tom?

Tom Yes... Cheerio. **(He goes inside.)**

Kath What was he on about?

Tom Oh, just chatting.

St. Only Tom knew and only Tom worried. But as harvest time came and Spider seemed his usual self once more, some days Tom didn't even think about what the doctor had said.

Spider Sis! Come!

SCENE 15 THE HUNTER'S PLAN

(The farm men, Percy, Billy and Ephraim, gather in the stable.)

Percy Thistle cutting today, up round Magg's Corner. **(Billy and Ephraim groan.)** Spider? Come here a minute. **(Spider comes round.)** You can have the day off today. It's a nice day, and you've worked well this last week, so have a little holiday.

Spider Holiday! Ta Percy! Sis! **(They go off as Mrs Yorke comes on, dressed for a hunt.)**

Mrs Y **(To Percy,)** I thought he was happy before he got his dog. He's even happier now.

Percy Good idea of yours, Ma'am.

Mrs Y Why thankyou! I do have them occasionally. Percy, I'm having a day's hunting from Bishopstrow. We shan't be coming over this way but I've told Tom to move his sheep nearer home. Better safe than sorry. Who knows which way the fox will take us.

Percy Have a good day, ma'am.

Mrs Y I shall, I shall. **(They exit in different directions.)**

SCENE 16 A CLOSE ENCOUNTER

(Spider comes on.)

St. Today Spider's holiday walk had taken him up to the southern boundary of the farm. Never before had he come this far up onto the Downs.

St. Spider had Sis well trained now.
(He whistles to Sis.)
If they came across a rabbit or a hare in the fields, Spider could soon bring her to heel.

(She comes to his feet.)

Spider Good Sis! **(He pats her.)**

Spider **(Looking in rabbit holes,)** Barrit's houses.

St. There were hundreds of rabbit holes, and amongst them, one much larger hole.

Spider Vox's house. **(The sound of a distant pack of hounds drifts to him now. He looks in the direction of the sound. Sis sniffs the air.)** Dogs.

St. Then he saw a fox coming over the ridge towards him.

(The fox has appeared over the brow of the hill. The noises of the hounds is growing.)

Spider Home Sis. **(She looks at him questioningly.)** Home! **(She runs offstage.)**

St. And now the hounds came over the ridge. **(The noise of hounds grows louder and louder.)**

Spider Run vox! Run vox! Run! **(The fox drags itself past Spider, struggling to make the last few yards to its hole. Spider runs the other way, towards the dogs, his shouting almost drowned by their baying, holding up his hands.)** Bad dogs! Bad dogs! Bad dogs! **(The hounds sweep over Spider and cover him completely. As they sweep away, Spider is gone.)**

(Kath enters downstage with a basket of washing and finds Sis. She crouches, strokes her head and holds her collar.)

Kath Sis? Where's Spider? **(Calling,)** Spider! **(To Sis again,)** Is something wrong? Is he hurt? Tom! Tom!

Tom What?

Kath Sis came home without Spider. Have you seen him?

Tom No. Percy said he'd given him the day off. He'll have gone for a walk, I dessay.

Kath But why would he send Sis home? **(Tom can't think of a reason.)** Tom, I'm worried. Spider! Spider!

Tom Don't worry, I'll find him.

Kath **(There's a sound of a horse approaching and of shouting. Suddenly Mrs Yorke appears on horseback with Spider riding behind her, clinging on to her waist, whooping with excitement at riding on a horse.)** Spider!

Spider Spider ride horse mum!

Kath Where've you been?

Spider Spider saw vox!

Mrs Y Mrs Sparrow, your son... Lord knows how, he found himself between a fox and the hounds. They were on the verge of killing it. But when we got to him, he was sitting up and the only danger he was in was of being licked to death!

Spider Bad dogs. Mustn't hurt vox.

Mrs Y If it had been any other boy, I dread to think what might've happened.

Tom Well, he's not like any other boy, ma'am, thank God.

SCENE 17 BIRTHDAY PRESENT

St. It was 1942. Overseas, battles were fought and men died, but life in the village went on quietly and peacefully as ever.

Tom/Kathie **(Finishing singing,)** ...Happy Birthday to you!

St. Spider was sixteen now.

(They give him a card and a present. Spider holds them up, not knowing which to open first.)

Kath Open the card first.

St. He understood nothing of the war.

Spider Barrit!

Kath Dada drew it. **(He hugs Tom.)**

St. His world was simply the extent of Outoverdown Farm.

Tom Now the present. **(Spider unwraps it.)**

Spider Clock! Little clock!

Kath A watch.

Spider Like Mama's. And Dada's. Ta!

Tom Now look. When the long hand points up, that marks the hour. And see these numbers? Where the short hand points, you can count round what time it is... one, two. See?

Spider Two o'clock?

Tom That's right!

(Spider stands up looking at his watch.)

Spider Spider walk with watch.

Kathie Let me put it on you. **(She straps it on him.)** Not too far. You be back in good time for tea, mind.

Spider What time Dada? **(Spider shows them the watch.)**

Tom Well. I got a sick ewe up in the yard as I want to take a look at later. You be there at five o'clock and we'll walk home together. **(He points at the watch and counts round the numbers.)** One, two, three, four, five. All right?

Spider Sis, come. **(Spider goes with Sis. Tom and Kath watch him go, smiling to themselves.)**

Kath Right. I got washing to do.

Tom What's for tea?

Kath Sausages. Don't be late.

Tom For sausages? Never.

SCENE 18 ANOTHER GIFT

St. A Sunday it was, and the sun shone warmly from an almost cloudless blue sky, and Spider went to his favourite place...

(Spider comes with Sis and sits close by the foxhole.)

Spider **(To Sis,)** Go Spider's house. Go on. Spider's house. Spider come soon.

(Sis goes. Spider waits. A fox emerges from the foxhole. Now, tentatively at first, two cubs emerge and begin to play. After a little while they dart into the hole again. Spider backs away and stands, speaking softly.)

Spider Bye vox. **(He goes. The fox goes.)**

SCENE 19 A HAPPY ENDING

St. Five o'clock came. And went.

(Tom comes. He looks at his watch and grins, shaking his head. Then he looks up and listens. Very faintly can be heard the sound of a dog howling.)

Tom Sis? **(He sets off, his pace quickening.)**

St. The greenness of the spinney was stippled with black, for in every ash tree there sat crows and rooks and jackdaws, still and silent.

(When Tom enters again, he is panting hard. He looks up, noticing the trees.)

Tom Spider!

(The birds fly up all at once. Sis comes to Tom from Spider's house then runs back there and lies outside it, looking at it. Tom goes there. He opens the shelter. Spider sits inside on the wooden crate, eyes closed as if asleep. Very gently Tom takes his hand and finds that it is cold. He listens to his heart but there is no beating. He takes the boy's hand to his face and holds it against his cheek, then embraces him for a long while. Gradually, through the following, Tom, Sis and Spider come out of the image and become storytellers once more, taking down Spider's house and moving to the brow of the hill.)

St. A westerly breeze...

St. ...coming over the shoulder of the downs.

St. **(Looking at Spider,)** It ruffles Spider's hair softly against his father's face...

St. **(Looking up,)** ...and lifts the crows up high, wheeling over the corn.

St. Down in the valley, the breeze stirs Kathie's washing on the line...

St. ...and carries the smell of sausages for tea out over the fields.

St. It blows on and on, tirelessly over the land...

St. ...on and away eastwards. On and away.

(One by one, the storytellers go back down over the hill and leave the stage.)

END.