KNIVES IN HENS

by David Harrower

Gilbert Horn    Liam Brennan
Pony William    Lewis Howden
Young Woman    Pauline Knowles

with music composed and performed by
Allan Henderson

Director    Philip Howard
Designer    Mark Leese
Lighting Designer    Chahine Yavroyan
Voice Coach    Ros Steen
Stage Manager    Gavin Johnston
Deputy Stage Manager    Kay Courteney-Chrystal
Assistant Stage Manager    Victoria Paulo
Wardrobe Supervisor    Lynn Ferguson
Wardrobe Assistant    Alice Taylor

First performed at the Traverse Theatre
Friday 2 June 1995; first performance of this
production Sunday 3 August 1997.
'I care for nobody, no not I, if nobody care for me.'

_Knives in Hens_ was commissioned by and first performed at the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, on 2 June 1995 and transferred to the Bush Theatre, London, on 28 November 1995. The cast was as follows:

**Young Woman**  
Pauline Knowles

**Pony William**  
Lewis Howden

**Gilbert Horn**  
Michael Nardone

_Directed by_ Philip Howard

_Design by_ Mark Leese

_Music composed and performed by_ Martyn Bennett
for George Gunn
**TRAVERE THEATRE • THE COMPANY**

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**Knives in Hens**

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Sir Eddie Kulukundis, Muriel Murray
Characters

Young Woman, a field-hand
Pony William, a ploughman
Gilbert Horn, a miller

Scene One

Rural place.

Cottage at the end of a village. Evening.

Young Woman  I'm not a field. How'm I a field? What's a field? Flat. Wet. Black with rain. I'm no field.
William  Never said that.
Young Woman  Says I'm a field sitting here.
William  Said you're like a field.
Young Woman  Said I'm a field sitting here.
William  Said you're like a field. Like a field.
Young Woman  'S the same.
William  Nothing close, woman.
Young Woman  If I'm like a field must be a field.
William (laughs)  Don't have to be a thing to be like it.
Young Woman  How?
William  Just don't.
Young Woman  'M I other things? Fire?
William  I got mud for feet. Can't feel them.
Young Woman  ... Shoe? Bed? Door?
William  'S what it's for . . . Like.
Young Woman  Never heard it 'fore.
William  Like, woman. The moon's like cheese. 'S like cheese. But it's not.
Young Woman  You been up there? The moon's the moon. Why's it like cheese?
William  Always been said. (Hears something.) What's that? The horses?
Young Woman So's cheese like the moon?
William Nnh. I'll go in and see them. They're not right.
Young Woman 'S cheese like the moon?
William I know more'n you.
Young Woman Know that.
William You're like anything I want. I say you were like a field. You were like it, sitting there. Not now. 'S gone. You're not like this field sitting there now.
Young Woman Tell you what I'm like. I'm like nothing but me.
William You got a good shape.
Young Woman You got a good shape.
William Good shape now. Best in the village.
Young Woman 'S that field? (He feels her) You tell me. 'S that field?
William You haven't seen the field.
Young Woman This's one field?
William Not many in the village know it.
Young Woman Where's it?
William Out-bye.
Young Woman I work on fields all over.
William Walk that way.
Young Woman Have before now.
William 'S the furthest over. The last field.
Young Woman I seen every field there is.
William 'S a good field. Good size. In all my years I've never seen it cheat or be stubborn or hold a grudge like others. Was made for a man, a horse and a plough. 'S flat and good 'til its end when it slopes but nothing that tires
you. The soil's good and rich -- so crops grow out the same. When it's rested the grass that grows's good too, and's the sweetest anywhere round here. Horses'ill tell you that after grazing. See now, woman.
Young Woman I'll walk to it one day. Walk back and tell you what I seen.
William I need washing 'fore I go to the horses.
Young Woman (as she leaves) Cheese the other women make's like the moon. My cheese's like cheese.
William Before, I lay there and the horses'd be grazing slowly around me. Once I looked up and all that's my body'd gone inside out. All that's me on a circle of out-bye grass. Red. Wet. Rabbit hearts tied up with cow's saliva. I've never said a thing. Clouds came off me same's when I've pulled a new horse out in December. Nearly gone now, that. 'Fore it got dark I led them back, down the village to the stables, with this field still in my head. Why'd it come to me? Was only a boy. Could've lived in that field all my life if they let me. Mud's stinking.

Scene Two

Open ground.

Young Woman enters carrying a basket.

Young Woman The wind blows. The sun shines. The crops grow. The sky ... The bird -- flies. The clouds ... The tree ... What? Stands. The tree stands. The sky ... The sky -- ... The rabbit runs. The clouds -- ... run? ... grow? The leaves on the tree -- ... hang? The sky -- ... The sky -- ...
Scene Three

Fields.

William in shirt-sleeves, eating. Young Woman sits. Between them the uncovered basket.

William You ill?
Young Woman No.
William Fever?
Young Woman No.
William What? Something wrong with you.
Young Woman Nothing.
William Seen you.
Young Woman Walking to here. With food for you and the plough-horse.
William Seen you standing there. What you doing?
Young Woman I was looking. I was looking at . . .
William What . . . ?
Young Woman I saw a . . . a puddle, a puddle you can see the earth under. Clear water puddle after fresh rain. See the cracks in the earth there. See birds feet. See the sun shining. You got a name for that?
William Puddle.
Young Woman No. The right name.
William Right name's puddle.
Young Woman How?
William You go straight to places, woman. You walk and don't stand.
Young Woman Puddle's dark, mud water. See nothing in it. What was that I saw? Clear shining water. What?

William Puddle. Still puddle. I've said 'fore. Dark puddle, clear puddle. 's the same.

Young Woman Things change each time I look at them.
Young Woman I don't know much. Don't know enough. When the wind makes the tree do this... (Shakes herself) What's that? There a name for that? Why's it do it? See straight under the leaves then. Dunno'f it's right to look. What's that?
William You'll get them. You'll get to know. You doubt God?
Young Woman No. Never doubt God.
William You're young still, 's why. I'm not. You'll get to know. Hear me? No more of it. What you done this morning?
Young Woman After you left, I killed two hens and fed the rest. I gave one away for a bag of salt; the other I hung over the fire to dry. I pulled four carrots from the earth and washed them. I drew fresh water from the well. I poured a candle with the last of the tallow. I dropped a knife on the cottage floor. I tanned a hide. I boiled stones in butter and kept the sauce. I weaved a blanket for our winter beds. I combed my hair for lice. I dropped to my knees and prayed. I stared at my hands. I brought food to you and the horse.

He eats, raises brow at the dropped knife, looks to the horse.

William We've worked each other hard since sun-up. You not eating?
Young Woman I'll watch you. 's better. Eat's a horse.

He imitates a masticating horse - unconsciously. She laughs.
William 's one thing you'll find every one has in
common. Every one likes to eat. Never met man or woman who hasn't. Even them in other parts, they like it.

Young Woman 'S that what's in your head when you plough? 'S that what you see? Other places. Other people. Eating.

William All ploughmen get tired of looking down at the earth. Black. Hurts the back and neck. Looked left or right they'd fall. I look up at the sky. But it hurts my neck and eyes.

Young Woman We're not to look up there long. Our faces'd be on top of our heads, flat, if we were.

William Know that.

Young Woman God watches every thing. He sees every thing. He has the names for every thing.

William 'S right. Our faces are here, north side, to look straight ahead.

Young Woman There's all we need to look at between our earth and his sky. I'm glad's us.

William Glad's us what?

Young Woman Glad's us got married. If I hadn't married you I'd have married someone else but it wouldn't be the same. Said that soon's I seen you.

William Pour me some milk.

Young Woman Like kissing your cock.

William Here. Eat.

Scene Four

Outside cottage.

Very early morning. Young Woman calling, walks to the stable.

Young Woman William? William?

William Sah. Sah. There. All right now. Quiet.

Young Woman William, William, will-he-be-here? William, William, will-he-be-here? (Enters.) William!

William SHUT YOUR MOUTH WOMAN OR BY GOD HIMSELF I'LL DO IT FOR YOU!!!! Woman? ... 'S what I said day we married. You don’t come in the stable without asking me. Puts the fear in the horses. They dunno what's is. Scares them.

Young Woman Sorry, William ... How long till I can?

William Don't speak for horses. Could be another summer. They got to trust your smell. And your voice. Each of them.

Young Woman ... Where're you?

William Stall on the end.

Young Woman The bed was empty. And cold.

William I was out most of the night.

Young Woman (moving further in) What's ... ?

William Stay back! This mare, she's in trouble. She's shaking.

Young Woman She dying?

William No. She got a young one inside her.

Young Woman That it?

William 'S her first time, woman.

Young Woman You be's quick when I'm carrying our first.

William Go in, woman. 'S cold.

Young Woman Know which one it was?

William Him there. Told him to stay away. (To horse) You know that's what I said. Stay away. Last time I trust that one. Now go in.
Every bone of your body. Hate. 'S a village custom.

Young Woman I do hate him!

William Again.

Young Woman I HATE him!

William Stronger!

Young Woman I HATE HIM!! Show him you're afraid, 's how it starts. I hate every miller there is. Throw them in a pond and watch their bodies swell and stink.

William You got it now. Eleventh of a peck, he gets. He can't steal more. You tell him - pull them sleeves up, miller.

Young Woman Pull them sleeves up, miller!

William ... when he weighs the flour. Eleventh of a peck. Bastard. 'N you watch him. You watch our grain.

Scene Five

Mill.

Soft sound of a river.

Young Woman unloads the first grain-sack with much effort.

Gilbert Horn appears, watches her. She becomes aware but carries on.

Gilbert You wanting help with your sacks?

Young Woman (low) You stay away from me, boy.

Gilbert Said d'you want help with your grain.

Young Woman No. Don't need your help.

Gilbert Makes it -

Young Woman I do it alone!

Gilbert First time for you here.
Young Woman I know what gets done.
Gilbert Know it's long, empty work then. Where's the husband? Lying ill and useless in bed?
Young Woman He's in the fields, pushing a plough, fit and strong.
Gilbert Knows his wife's a fair strength herself. Sending her alone.
Young Woman I wasn't sent, miller-man. I came. Now get the stone turning. I want finished quick.
Gilbert Come and tell it yourself. 'S beautiful, no? You want finished quick? Tell it. Stone turns only for itself. Listens to no one. Not even a woman on her own. You'll sit and wait like all the others. Husband not tell you that?
Young Woman Where's the grain go?
Gilbert There. I'll open the river for the wheel. Go into my house. There's fire and a stool to sit on.
Young Woman I'm standing here.
Gilbert The stone's old. Takes time.
Young Woman Right here, I said.
Gilbert When it turns you want no ears.
Young Woman Standing here till I see my flour.
He goes. Wheel starts to turn. The noise grows, becomes deafening. She endures it, shaking, hands to her ears. Finally runs out.

Scene Six
Gilbert's house.
He sits at a table. Young Woman comes to the door.
Young Woman Freezing in there.
Gilbert You want some ale. A dram? (Shakes her head.) Coming in or staying there?

Young Woman Stand right where I am.
Gilbert You won't care if I take a drop?
Young Woman Don't care anything you do. 'S your house.
He drinks, then yawn-shouts.
Gilbert Aaaawhhhh. Oh ... work ... work ... work ...
Young Woman Must break your back that stone doing the work.
Gilbert Ih?
Silence. He drinks more.


Long silence. Finally points to the door.

See that? There. There. 'S a name. You know it? Door-stump. That's my door-stump ... 'S that not what your village believes?
Young Woman What?
Gilbert When a thing's got a name 's got a use?
Young Woman Dunno what you're ... Not getting me to shut this door, miller-man.
Gilbert Stop that cold air freezing up 'my house'.
Young Woman I want to see my grain.
Gilbert 'S staying there.
Young Woman I came with five sacks ... 
Gilbert Well counted.
Young Woman I'm leaving with five sacks.
Gilbert How'd I get it sat here?
He gets up for more drink. Begins to whistle softly. She's getting more frantic, watching her grain, watching him.

Young Woman You stop! Stop!

Gilbert Ih?

Young Woman Get my husband out to you, boy! Said stop! ... Why you laughing? STOP!!

Gilbert They got another living in the ground. Dirt in your eyes, field-hand. Mouth flapping in the wind. Ears open. Shovels filled them with the names of Gilbert Horn. What you got rotting in there?

Young Woman I got nothing there.

Gilbert No? Not the power of magic I have? The death charms? Not which plants're to be picked special. Not which bones and eyes of animals and birds need kept and powdered? Nothing of my wife and child? Not that I killed them both? Not that I've no want of family? None've that in there?

Young Woman Evil-breath!

Begins to inch out backwards.

Gilbert Where you going, dung-brain?

Young Woman Away from your evil, bastard.


Young Woman Not taking my eyes off you, boy. Not turning my back. You'll die you touch me.

He turns away, sits down again. She's almost out.

Gilbert ... 'S you married that Pony William, wasn't it?

She freezes.

'S who shares your bed. The village ploughman. Pony William . . .

Young Woman No. No.

Gilbert No?

Young Woman You leave him.

Gilbert That not his name? Pony William.

Young Woman 'S name's William.

Gilbert I hear Pony William.

Young Woman You don't say that.

Gilbert 'S what most in the village call him.

Young Woman Liar.

Gilbert I hear them. Pony William –

Young Woman Liar!

Gilbert 'N Pony's bride.

Young Woman I'd spit on them say that.

Gilbert Heard's 'cos of his love for the younger horses.

Young Woman No . . .

Gilbert No? ... Just the one horse? Special horse?

Young Woman ... That's envy.

Gilbert Envy? Not heard that spoke in a long time. 'S the village tell you what it is?

Young Woman 'Course.

Gilbert How's that envy?

Young Woman Envy of us back there. In the village.

Gilbert Envy of you and Pony and them others all living in a death place? All them rotted lives? How've I envy?

Young Woman I know. 'S a look. The eyes. Like evil.

Gilbert Do it.

Young Woman What?

Gilbert Envy.
Young Woman Can't.
Gilbert Why?
Young Woman Haven't got it. Stupid.
Gilbert 'S what they say.
Young Woman Who?
Gilbert 'S that what you seen?
Young Woman What?
Gilbert Horses come first with him.
Young Woman No. Loves me first.
Gilbert First.
Young Woman 'N always.
Gilbert Then you won't like it?
Young Woman I like love. Better'n evil.
Gilbert You don't like them calling him Pony William?
Young Woman You leave that name I said.
Gilbert You don't like Pony William.
Young Woman NO. No.
Gilbert Then there you are.
Young Woman Where?
Gilbert What power've you over others' tongues?
She leaves.

Scene Seven

Cottage.
William comes on to find Young Woman there.
William You left our sacks there, woman?
Young Woman That miller's stone's old and weak. Stood freezing as he sat.
William All my grain left with that miller—
Young Woman Still our grain tomorrow, William.
William 'N how do I sleep tonight.
Young Woman We'll sleep. Then you take the horse and cart tomorrow. Flour'll be ground then. Ready.
William You wanting me to go back?
Young Woman I'll stay with the mare. Or go to the fields.
William Back 'n find him sitting there laughing.
Young Woman No. He knows you. Knows what you'd do.
William No? Not laughing? The miller who does nothing. Sitting there with our five sacks at his feet. Who never walks a field or pushes a plough. Pushing his hands into the grain we grew. We've given him all he wants. The miller who's afraid of the land. Not laugh, woman? You go into his house?
Young Woman Stood freezing as he sat.
William Place he never leaves. Where he sits and talks.
Young Woman 'N talks and talks.
William 'S what he'll do to the next goes to his mill. Tell them of the ploughman and his wife who ran when she was afraid.
Young Woman I didn't run.
William The wife who left the grain behind. Be him, the bastard miller, talking 'bout us then. Can't be me goes back, woman. You had good hate of him. Where's it gone? Only fear now. Where's the hate?
William  'Cos he sees what he'll never have.
Young Woman  What?
William  Good strong wife. Know that, woman. Don't have to say it. Had my eye on you for years. Watched you grow. Picked you to be my wife. Who'd work same's me. Who'd sweat same's me. Who'd only listen to what's right. Listen to the stone, not the miller. All he's got's that mouth. To talk all day and all night to no one. 'S nothing. Now go back. Go. Be my wife.

Scene Eight

Countryside.

Young Woman  The sun warms the wind that blows. The wind pushes the clouds under the sky. Black cloud holds the rain. White cloud ... The bird flies under the white cloud — into the tree. Tree's for wood. The bird's for ... One bird. One's lucky, two's unlucky, three's health, four's wealth, five's sickness, and six is death. Dead bird, bake a pie. The wind pushes the white cloud under the sun. White cloud's for ... The rabbit runs on the field. Rabbit's food. The bird — the tree ... loses the bird. Bird's gone. The wind pushes the white cloud off the sun. White cloud's for ... White cloud's for ...

Scene Nine

Gilbert's house.

Gilbert  sits at his table, writing on paper with an ink pen.
Young Woman  appears, remains in the doorway. She watches him and also the pen. Finally he looks up, across at her.

Gilbert  Still five. You counted? Still five there, ih?
Pause.

Last sack's on.

Young Woman  I seen that.
Gilbert  Where'd you go?
Young Woman  Had other work to do. Couldn't stand wasting time. Hearing talk about nothing.
Gilbert  Won't be long to stand now.

A long pause.

Young Woman  'S a new stone you need, miller. I'm wanting to get home 'fore the sky goes black.
Gilbert  Stonemason's nearly finished the new one. When he's done your village men'll roll it out here, to me.
He writes again.

Young Woman  ... What you got there?
Gilbert  What?
Young Woman  ... that.
Gilbert  This? You don't know what this is? 'S a pen. Ink pen.
Young Woman  What you wanting with that?
Gilbert  Sold to me at market by a travelling musician.
Young Woman  Food-money spent on a useless stick.
Gilbert  'S worth the price.
Young Woman  Flour you steal from us 's what bought it.
Gilbert  See how the firelight shines on it.
Young Woman  What's it — feed you?
Gilbert  No.
Young Woman  Warm you?
Gilbert  'S a good weight in the hand.
Young Woman  Waste.
Gilbert  Write with it too.
Young Woman  What?
Gilbert  I ... write ...
Young Woman  What d'you write?
Gilbert  What I've done.
Young Woman  Grind corn. Stop grinding corn. Grind corn. Stop grinding corn.
Gilbert  More'n that.
Young Woman  Must be the laird's new game. Only he'd write down the nothing he does. You wanting to be the laird now, miller?
Gilbert  I've more life than corn. I write what's in here, in my head. End of the day, every day. Here ... to here.

Holds up a sheaf of papers.

Look how much of me there is. Can tell what's in my head yesterday, or ... last winter, and most days since.
Young Woman  Then's an evil trick!
Gilbert  Evil?
Young Woman  Ready for the fire.
Gilbert  Evil - this? How?
Young Woman  'S God puts things in your head and's him who takes them away. 'S sin to keep them.
Gilbert  Field-hand, could not be God gave us this ...
Young Woman  Not us.
Gilbert  ...so's we can know more't the world?
Young Woman  'S an evil stick you made.
Gilbert  I can tell who's come to my mill, who's stood outside, who's come in to drink, who's said not a word,

who's cursed me over and over, who's stood in my doorway, who's been so afraid of Gilbert Horn they turned and ran back to the village with their husband's ... (Writes.) ... horse and cart.

Pause. She realises.

Young Woman  You take that off there!
Gilbert  Ink's dry now.
Young Woman  ...Then burn it. Do it, bastard! Give it to the fire.

Gilbert  I thank him I wasn't born in that village. 'S a black pit. Pulled from the womb older'n when you die. Elders stand at the bed-end and use knives to drain away the blood. Dark night's what's left round your bones. Pull out eyes and leave cold pebbles in the hollows.
Young Woman  You reel of evil filth words, boy!
Gilbert  Evil - what else a villager say faced with a man got eyes and tongue who're trusted friends? Man who looks slow and close at the world for all the names it's got. 'Sky's going black?' Not over me. I live under different sky.
Young Woman  'S earth we'll put you under - fill you over. Stop up that mouth.
Gilbert  I'll be you then. Under earth. Seeing nothing out pebble eyes. Seeing nothing.
Young Woman  I see.
Gilbert  Knowing nothing.
Young Woman  I see. Know what I see.
Gilbert  Track. Mud. Horse. Here. There. Sky ...
Young Woman  See more'n that. I got names for most things in God's world.
Gilbert  Tell me what.
Young Woman  I'll tell you nothing. Not giving you what's in my head.
Gilbert  Stink of shit, 's why.
Young Woman  I got things ... I got things. Not speaking them.
Gilbert  leans over, places the pen on side of table nearest to her.
Gilbert  Then write them.
Young Woman  Not touching that....
Gilbert  Write what you seen coming to my mill. Show me the village 's more'n peasants with rotting shit in their heads.
Young Woman  Stone you for that.
Gilbert  'Course...
Young Woman  You wanting stoned? I'll tell them.
Gilbert  Can't write.
Young Woman  I can write, boy!
Gilbert  Prove it. (Shakes her head) How's this evil? You write.
Young Woman  'S chalk we had.
Gilbert  Pen's better chalk.
Young Woman  Still not getting any thing from my head.
Gilbert  What'll I do? Only ink on paper.
Young Woman  Dunno. Some thing.
Gilbert  After you write I'll put it in the fire.
Young Woman  'S tricks.
Gilbert  Then you take it. Carry it home. Show Pony what you can do.
Young Woman  hesitates.

Young Woman  No ... Why d'you want what's in here?
'S mine.
Gilbert  How'll anyone ever know? (Silence.) You can write, ih?
Young Woman  Said I could.
Gilbert  Then give me something outside you. That all the village knows.
Young Woman  What you wanting, miller?
Gilbert  ... Your name.
Silence. Finally she comes to the table. He pushes paper towards her.
Young Woman  No tricks.
Gilbert  None.
She has difficulty mastering the pen. Resolve.
Young Woman  Show you I'm no dung-brain.
She holds the paper up so he can read.
Gilbert  Tell you what, horse-wife. You're beautifully named.
They look at each other. He gets up. She moves back to the door with the paper.
Your flour's ready. I got to take what's mine.

Scene Ten

Cottage.

William  Here's wife. She've any more trouble with Killer-miller? (Shakes her head.) She stable the horse right?
(Nod.) She come back with our five sacks? (Nod.) She keep a close eye on the flour? (Nod.) She wanting a bowl of meal?
(Shake.) She’ll find them husks get everywhere. She’ll feel they’re growing under her skin. She’ll find water to wash with. She’ll be thankful for her husband’s hand.

She goes to the water. Wearily looks down at herself, gives a small scream when she sees the black marks that are on the thumb and forefinger of one hand.

**Young Woman** Auh...!

**William** ... What’s it, woman?

**Young Woman** freezes.

**Young Woman** Spark. From the fire. William, we can go straight to bed.

**William** No washing?

**Young Woman** Could you not take sweat and roughness on you for a night?

**William** S eyes widen, grins.

**William** No better words spoke since we wed.

**Young Woman** Lie down. I’ll be quick.

He crosses to the bed. She dips her fingers in the water, starts rubbing. **William** whistles as he undresses and gets on the bed. A laughing vision of **Gilbert** now appears, wearing a dazzling white miller’s apron. At his feet a sack of flour.

**William** You coming, woman?

**Young Woman** I’m there, William, I’m...

She closes her eyes trying to get rid of him. Concurrent sound of rubbing hands, **William**’s whistling, **Gilbert**’s just-audible laughter.

How’s the mare, William?

**William** She’s better...  

**Young Woman** O Sweet God in Heaven...
*Gilbert.* Goes to her clothes, then out the house and off.

**Scene Twelve**

*Countryside.*

*Before dawn.*

**Young Woman** When the sun comes back the warm wind will blow on my face. When I look up I will see the sun shine bright in the sky. The clouds will . . . be white. The crops . . . the strong crops will grow on the good field. The bird will sing on the tall tree. The tall tree will . . . stand and the warm wind will shake the leaves. The rabbit will run on the good field where the strong crops grow. New day will start and end the night. Night will be gone.

**Scene Thirteen**

*Gilbert's house.*

**Young Woman** Bastard! Open up! Take it off!


**Young Woman** You know where he's, miller. You charmed him. Only me here. Only me here, filth. Open your door. Stand here till you do, boy. *(Door opens.)* You take it off us, miller! You take it off!

**Gilbert** What you wanting?

**Young Woman** Take your charm off me and my ploughman. What we done?

**Gilbert** You're talking madness.

**Young Woman** You got envy of us! See it now. In the eyes.

**Gilbert** Go home.

**Young Woman** I'll get other men out here. You do it with this, ih? Tricker. Water washed it off. Can't be a strong charm. Got in my head. Climbed in. Laughing. Throwing flour over us. 'S your magic. Charming him out to the stables. Making your laugh a woman's. That it gone now?

*She's torn the paper as she spoke.*

**Gilbert** A woman's laugh?

**Young Woman** That it gone? Tell me, miller.

**Gilbert** D'you look in the stables, horse-wife?

**Young Woman** Wasn't looking at any more if your tricks.

**Gilbert** A woman's laugh. Ha ha.

**Young Woman** Take it off, miller . . . Please. Beg you. You want to lie with me? That it. Leave us then. Here. Pleasure for you under here, miller.

**Gilbert** Get up . . . All I need's to kiss you.

*She goes to kiss him. He gets lost in it, in her.*

**Young Woman** Gone now, oh . . . 'S it off, miller, ih? *(He shrugs.)* What's that? 'S gone now.

**Gilbert** Dunno. Just wanted to kiss you. Only charm I know.

*As he grins, he's violently punched by Young Woman, falls.*

**Young Woman** O God make this man die in cold pain! Evil!

**Gilbert** FUCK OFF YOU! I got no magic! FUCK OFF AWAY FROM ME! Fuck off back to your silent village! Fuck off back to your greedy man! 'N run! RUN!! You'll catch the Robertson girl still licking on his tired cock.

**Young Woman** has backed away. He slams the door. She stands still, alone outside his house.
Scene Fourteen

Gilbert's house.

Much later. Young Woman still outside. Gilbert comes to put a blanket around her. She turns and walks into the house, sits at the table, picks up the pen, begins writing on the sheets of paper there.

Scene Fifteen

Inside Gilbert's house.

Young Woman wakes from sleep at the table, aware of his blanket around her.

Gilbert 'S evening. Better'n any bed, that soft paper. Lay down on it myself.

Young Woman Why'm I here? What you done to me?

Gilbert Nothing. You held the pen yourself.

Young Woman looks at the pen, sees the paper, reads.

Young Woman 'This is me. I live now. Others have, more will. I was born here because God wanted it. He had me sit in my mother till I could look at all that is his world. Every thing I see and know is put in my head by God. Every thing he created is there every day, sunrise to sundown, earth to sky. It cannot be touched or held the way I touch a table or hold the reins of a horse. It cannot be sold or cooked. His world is there, in front of my eyes. All I must do is push names into what is there the same as when I push my knife into the stomach of a hen. This is how I know God is there. I look at a tree and say tree then walk on. But there is more of the tree that is God which I have no names for. Each day I want to know more. A puddle I can see under. A tree when it is blown by the wind. A carrot that is sweeter than the others. The cold earth under a rock. The warm breath of a tired horse.

Scene Sixteen

Cottage. Night.

William in bed. Young Woman standing above him.

William . . . 'S that? You? . . . Woman . . . ?

Young Woman Yes, William.

William Haw . . . Where you been?

Young Woman The last field.

William Hh?

Young Woman The furthest over. Said I'd walk out to it one day. Come back and tell you what I seen.
William You been gone the full day, woman...

Young Woman I was praying.

William For a full day?

Young Woman For us, William. Praying for us and what we have. Was so beautiful I had to pray, William. Longer God's given the greater his reward. Asked for a full harvest, William.

William 'S good.

Young Woman 'N the horses to stand strong.

William 'S the right prayer.

Young Woman 'N the mare. Prayed for her.

William Her foal'll be here by the week's end.

Young Woman Don't want her hurting more. Or moaning. Like she does.

William You tell me't you go out there again.

Young Woman I will.

William You live here, you stay here. No going off and saying nothing.

He goes to her, arms around her.

'S good to feel you, woman. Whole village I searched for you. 'You seen my woman?' 'You seen my woman?'

Young Woman What'd they say?

William None had.

Young Woman How far'd you come out the village, William?

William Couldn't go far. I had a field to plough. And the new mill-stone pulled upright ready for rolling tomorrow.

Young Woman Tomorrow?

William 'S why I needed you back. 'S our first 'rolling-of-the-stone' as man and wife. Us men need you women to shout us on. Now come to bed, woman.

Young Woman I had to go, William. Had to see this field. You were right. It is like me. 'S a beautiful field.

William 'S what I said. Now come down, woman, come down.

Young Woman You need washing 'fore sleep, William?

William No.

Young Woman You done it?

William No wife here to help. Not take roughness and sweat on you for a right?

Later in the night.

Gilbert has appeared again. Young Woman moves pleasantly on the bed, eyes open. She crosses to take flour from the sack, rubs it on herself. William screams in his sleep.

William Uuaagh! Uh ... oh.

Gilbert disappears. She returns to the bed.

Young Woman William.

William Oh ... You not hear it, woman? 'S falling off you. Oh.

Young Woman What?

William Skin ... your skin ... I'd my hands on you, touching and it came off ... like cattle hide. Dry. Oh. Tore off warm. Left you with holes all over, and ... your eyes never opened. You not hear it, woman? Tears. Oh. You not hear it? Oh. Needing water.

He stumbles away. She lies down.
Scene Seventeen

Village. Outside the stonemason's.

Noise of villagers. William and Young Woman.

William Look at the rock! Look at its size. Stonemason! You've made your village proud. 'S the finest stone ever been carved. Best time of year, this. All the village together. God knows. Given us the day for it. Shining sun and the west wind. 'S what we asked for. Hold yourself, miller, sitting alone in your mill. When the stone rolls, the earth thunders! Be sure and keep up, woman. Shout your stoneman on.

Scene Eighteen

Outside mill.

Young Woman and William sit aft the new mill-stone's been placed. Gilbert comes on carrying a whisky leg.

William What you want, miller? We rest now.
Gilbert To thank the village for its labour and its sweat.
William We roll the stone for us, miller. Our rent can only be paid with flour.
Young Woman And our bread only baked with it.
Gilbert Will you've a miller's dram of gratitude?
William Have others drunk it?
Gilbert Some have, some haven't.
William I'll try your potion, miller.
Young Woman William, make him drink it first.
Gilbert drinks, proffers it to William.

Gilbert She's a beautiful stone ... more than stone monument. A second church. Carved from love and life in equal parts.

Young Woman 'N who takes it? The most undeserving.
William laughs.

Gilbert Will your woman take a drop?
William Will you, woman?
Young Woman I will. 'S water, not whisky! Weak and cold.
William Woman's right.
Young Woman You wash in it, miller? That how you brew it?
Gilbert Does me. Out here.

Young Woman No one to help drink it, 's why.
William I'll have more. Rid you of it.

Young Woman You want good whisky, miller, come to the village. Buy from us.
William Off now, miller. Leave us.

Young Woman slumps to the ground.

William Woman ... ? Woman! What you done, miller?!
Gilbert ... I done nothing.
William This's you, I'll kill you.

Gilbert Swear, ploughman.

William Woman ... (feels her face.) Stupid woman. Stupid. Standing on a field for a day. Too many prayers and no food. We've work to finish. Not wanting to see the old stone broken up?

Gilbert Ploughman. I want it kept.
William No. 'S old. Finished. This's work the men want.
Gilbert 'M asking you, ploughman. I want it kept. Was
the last stone turned by me and my wife. Served me well. Served the village well.

William Where you want it, miller? Rolled to your bed?

Gilbert Behind the house's a shed. Stand it along the far wall.

William Nah.

Gilbert 'S a long walk home. I've a fire built inside. Your woman'd be better by its warmth.

William 'T you can, take her in. 'S work you know, miller. Carrying women.

Gilbert My thanks again, ploughman...

William Been told. Don't want your thanks. You be standing when I'm back, woman.

William goes. Gilbert shouts to him.

Gilbert Ploughman! Tell your men to cover the face. Shed's my privy.

Turns to see Young Woman sitting up. They both walk off.

Scene Nineteen

Gilbert's house.

Young Woman on the bed. Gilbert by her. William comes in.


Gilbert I've nothing.

William 'S night, woman. I need sleep. No horse have you, miller?

Gilbert No need of one. Sleep here with her.

Gilbert  Loved my wife.

William (laughs)  Village'd run me out for that talk.

Gilbert  Why?

William  You stand in church, same's me.

Gilbert  Never listen.

William  'The glory of God is God, not his creation.' S what they say now. I need to piss. You believe that, miller? Glory of God's God, not his creation.

Gilbert  Dunno.


Gilbert  She's your wife.

William  I'm a ploughman, miller. Earth gets weak you keep turning it. You got to rest it. Always other fields to start on. – More God.

Gilbert  You know where's the shed. Walk to the sound of the river.

William  Fool you believe I'm going in this blackness.

---

He takes a candle, goes out. Young Woman sits up, walks to the door, goes out. Gilbert follows.

Scene Twenty

Shed.

William using the privy. The old mill-stone in candlelight. Young Woman and Gilbert emerge from behind it. They push the stone over.

Scene Twenty-One

Gilbert's house.

Gilbert and Young Woman opposite each other, watching the other slowly undress. From the shed come William's faint death screams. The screams fade. They walk to the bed.

Scene Twenty-Two

Gilbert's house.

After. Young Woman and Gilbert lying together.

Young Woman  You've said nothing.

Gilbert  Waiting for him to stop.


Gilbert  Tell me what's in your head?


Gilbert  I got some thing in here, some thing –

Young Woman  What?

Pause.
Look. Sun's rising.

**Gilbert** Same's yesterday.

**Young Woman** Never seen it from the mill. Never seen these colours. 'S the thing in your head. Look. 'S God giving us more? what He is. Look. New world front'f us. The morning I ran here, you said, you shouted — ... Fuck ... Off.

**Gilbert** Fuck off.

**Young Woman** No one's ever said that to me. Never heard it before.

**Gilbert** First time I've ever said it.

**Young Woman** 'S it mean?

**Gilbert** Dunno. Was shouted at market. A Bible-seller back from Germany. A boy was pissing against his stall.

**Young Woman** Fuck. Off. 'S mine now.

**Gilbert** Before, standing there ... he said, your ploughman said — 'What you got in your head, miller, looking at her?' You hear him? I saw my wife. Woman that was my wife. Then you were there. In here. My head. No clothes. Pushing. Sweating. Groaning like the wind. Eyes open, arms open, I was in your mouth, at your cunt, in your hair. 'S it God put you there? My body was like nothing I've known in my life. 'S it God did that? No ... Not God. Was what your ploughman said. Was his words.

**Young Woman** No.

**Gilbert** His words made me do that.

**Young Woman** All his talk's lies.

**Gilbert** In my own head. Was me.

**Young Woman** No. Ploughman couldn't see. He knew nothing. I'm not like any thing. You seen that.

**Gilbert** Was me.

---

**Young Woman** You seen that. Tell me you seen that now.

**Gilbert** Not God. Me. You not understand, woman?

**Young Woman** No.

**Gilbert** In my own head.

**Young Woman** Stop this talk. 'S him. 'S him.

**Gilbert** Where you going?

**Young Woman** Ploughman needs burial. His mouth filled up with earth.

**Gilbert** Bury him here?

**Young Woman** 'S near full light. I've to walk back to the village.

**Gilbert** 'Cos'f what I said. About your God.

**Young Woman** No. I've to tell them. William's gone. Bed's empty and cold. Fields empty. Stables empty.

**Gilbert** They'll still come for me — your village.

**Young Woman** The hated miller.

**Gilbert** Can't live without their ploughman.

**Young Woman** No. He's left me. He's gone for a better wife. He walked away in the night. I sit alone by the fire. Look at my tear puddles. I'm the broken-hearted wife.'

**Gilbert** How long?

**Young Woman** Until what? Until they believe.

**Gilbert** And after?

**Young Woman** Live in the mill?

**Gilbert** Live in the village?

_She goes._

'S not You. 'S me.
Scene Twenty-Three

Stables.

Young Woman delivers the mare's pony.


Scene Twenty-Four

Field. Day.

Some time after. Young Woman stands looking around her. Mouths silently to herself. Gilbert appears.

Gilbert  Day's over. You not walk back with the rest of the village? They say you speak to no one. Heard them talk about you at my mill. Works in the fields. Cares for the horses. Sits in her house at night. Not one word.

Young Woman  Why speak to any of them? Village believed me.

Gilbert  Broken-hearted wife.

Young Woman  Said all I needed to.

Gilbert  They never came for me.

Young Woman  You never ran.

Gilbert  Village'll find an empty mill tomorrow.

Young Woman  Where's the miller gone?

Gilbert  To the town won't call me 'miller'.

Young Woman  Have to walk far.

Gilbert  See more't the world. Seen all this. Know all this. Nothing left for me. Every thing I have 's in here.

Young Woman  Things change every time I look at them. Each has a name.

Gilbert  Still see you. Every day I wake. Still hear his words.

Young Woman  So many names. I'll learn every one.

Gilbert  I want more. In the town there's books and pens and paper. Owned by people who've left villages. They speak all day about every thing in the world.

Young Woman  'S what you been told?

Gilbert  Have to believe some thing.

Young Woman  New things in my head. Every time I look. New names. Don't need somewhere else.

Gilbert  There's more the village's saying.

Young Woman  What?

Gilbert  Was you pulled the new horse out alone.

Young Woman  Horses trust me now.

Gilbert  You looked at it close?

Young Woman  'S a beautiful horse. Quick and strong.


Young Woman  Say more'n that. Say he's happier now than he ever was. Village's right. Pony is.

Gilbert  Here, horse-wife. Write what you know now. Write what you see.

He has given her the pen. He leaves.

Young Woman  Village needs a new miller.

End.