

Excerpt Terms & Conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity of scripts.

Family Plays

GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE

Comedy adapted by
I.E. CLARK

From the original comedy published in 1575



GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE

Comedy. Adapted by I.E. Clark. Cast: 5m., 5w. Since introduced, the one-act adaptation of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* has become one of America's most popular short plays. In response to many requests, here is the full-length version of the play, a faithful rendering of the original, but in language that your students can read and audiences understand. *Gammer Gurton's Needle* has some of the most delightful characters ever created. Gammer is a widow in a tiny rural Elizabethan English village. She is the proud possessor of a needle—but she loses it. Hodge is terribly brave when there is no danger and terribly clever when there is no problem. Tyb is Gammer's maidservant, the only person in the world who can leave a garbage dump dirtier just by walking through it. Dame Chat is the neighbor who loves a good hair-pulling, and Dr. Rat is the curate, whose skull gets split, and Master Bailey, who has to try to settle it all. But most of all, Diccon the Bedlam is an alumnus of Bethlehem Hospital for the mentally disturbed. Everyone gets mentally disturbed when Diccon plays his tricks. Premiered by a community theatre, it was acclaimed as one of the funniest, most delightful plays available for a general audience. *Gammer Gurton's Needle* is intended for all groups. A director's script is available containing drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging, and discussion of characterization, plot and theme. It also suggests the complete blocking and full stage directions for all movement and business. Simple ext. set. Costumes: late medieval (mostly rags). Approximate running time: 90 to 100 minutes. Code: GB3.

Two sets of 35-mm color slides are available. Set A provides a pictorial outline of the entire play. A great help with characterization, movement, pantomime, picturization, costumes, set, lighting, etc. Set B provides close-up views of the costumes and makeup of each character and of the principal set pieces. The two sets together provide a complete synopsis of this famous old comedy—an interesting and effective way to open a classroom unit on the Elizabethan period.

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-13 978-0-88680-066-6



9 780886 800666 >

Gammer Gurton's Needle

GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE

IN THREE ACTS

Turned into
Modern English
and
Adapted by
I. E. Clark

*from the original comedy
by "Mr. S., Master of Art"*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by FAMILY PLAYS without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website www.FamilyPlays.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: FAMILY PLAYS, 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

© 1970 by
I.E. CLARK

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-066-6

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE

This three-act version of *Gammer Gurton's Needle* was first produced by Backstage, Inc., a community theatre, in Schulenburg, Texas, on February 26, 27, and 28, 1970, with the following cast:

DICCON, *the Bedlam**. Bob Parsons
HODGE, *Gammer Gurton's manservant* Bill Butts
TYB, *Gammer Gurton's maidservant* Beth Butts
GAMMER GURTON Pauline LaBrose
COCKE, *Gammer Gurton's boy servant*. . . . Sheldon Lippman
DAME CHAT Evelyn Kaase
DOLL, *Dame Chat's maid* Georgia Bohlmann
DR. RAT, *the curate*. Walter Simpson
MASTER BAILEY George of St. Benedict's Farm
†SCAPETHRIFT, *his aide* Nettie Cernosek

and
GIB, *the cat*

*

Setting: A village in Old England

ACT I

Late afternoon of a day in 1552

ACT II

The same afternoon, a few hours later

ACT III

The next morning

*

*A "Bedlam" was a person who had been released from Bethlehem Hospital, an asylum for the insane. He was licensed to provide for himself by begging.

†This role may be played by a male or a female.

About The Play

Gammer Gurton's Needle is famous as the second oldest comedy in the English language. Written about 1552, several years before Shakespeare was born, the play helped open the fabulous Elizabethan Period – the Golden Age of English literature.

The play was first published in 1575, with a title page which read: “A Ryght Pithy, Pleasaunt and merie Comedy: Intytuled Gammer gurtons Nedle . . . made by Mr. S. Mr. of Art . . . God saue the Queene.”

Four hundred years later we still aren't sure who “Mr. S., Master of Art” is. The play is a rollicking farce laid in a sixteenth century English hamlet which might have been the model for Li'l Abner's Dogpatch. Among its often-patched, seldom-washed inhabitants is Gammer Gurton, a jolly old gossip whose most precious possession is a steel needle. But, alas! – Gammer loses her needle, and the entire village finds itself in a turmoil. Hodge searches valiantly (but inanely), Diccon complicates matters with some devilish mischief, and Dame Chat is ready to fight anybody at the drop of a cock's feather.

This version by I. E. Clark reduces the original five acts to three and “translates” the archaic sixteenth century language (which would be unintelligible to modern audiences). The rhyme of the original is retained, but this Acting Script is printed in prose form to help actors avoid a sing-song delivery (the ‘*Stage Magic*’ Production Script is printed in poetry form to show the original presentation).

Community theatres and educational theatres will find *Gammer* a “right pithy, pleasant, and merry” addition to the season's fare. Unlike most Elizabethan plays, this one is simple to costume – mostly rags and patches.

Many plays which are historically famous are no longer performed today because they mean little to twentieth century American audiences. But *Gammer Gurton's Needle* continues to delight theatregoers with its lovable characters, its tingling farce, and its universal message. What message? Well – read the play and see what you think about all that fuss over a needle.

'STAGE MAGIC' PRODUCTION SCRIPTS

Stage directions in this playscript have been kept to a minimum for a specific reason: Many directors want their actors and actresses to create their own characterizations without help from the play publisher. An imaginative cast member often introduces exciting bits of business and line readings if he is made to do his own thinking. But if printed stage directions do his thinking for him, his own creativity is nearly always stifled.

Some directors, on the other hand, are so deluged with details of publicity, ticket sales, and house management that they can never find time to devote full attention to staging, blocking, and characterization. For these harried directors, '*Stage Magic*' provides a director's Production Script loaded with full stage directions which show every action of every actor in detail.

The Production Script describes the blocking of each scene. It contains drawings and information on costumes, scenery, props, lighting, make-up, and other technical aspects of the play.

To save the director even more time, the Production Script gives details on the background and significance of the play and discusses the characterization of each role.

With the help of the '*Stage Magic*' Production Script the inexperienced director can present a praiseworthy production.

But '*Stage Magic*' Production Scripts are a dream-come-true for the experienced director, too. Experienced directors know how many hours of research must be spent to stage a worthwhile play successfully. Although the experienced director may decide to ignore many of the stage directions and other suggestions, he will find that the '*Stage Magic*' Production Script saves hours of his valuable time by supplying authenticated details which are the fruits of extensive research into the history of the play, the period in which it is laid, and the circumstances or environment under which it was written.

Each '*Stage Magic*' Production Script is the work of the director who successfully staged the play. It is an invaluable tool.

'*Stage Magic*' Production Scripts may be obtained from

'STAGE MAGIC' PLAYS

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

GAMMER GURTON'S NEEDLE

By I. E. Clark

Act I

[The scene represents a street on the edge of a small village in early sixteenth century England. At Up Left is the facade of a tumble-down two-story house; this is where Gammer Gurton lives. At Up Right is the facade of a tumble-down one story house with a Dutch door; this is where Dame Chat lives. Running from one house to the other, up-stage, is a rickety fence, with a stile at Up Center. (See 'STAGE MAGIC' Production Script for a fully detailed description and drawings of set, costumes, etc.)]

As the curtain rises, loud voices, noise, objects, and screams fly out of Gammer's house (the door stands partially open). DICCON, an unkempt man of indeterminate age, with a scraggly beard and scraggly clothes, enters. He hears the clamor. The noise frightens him – his first thought always is that someone is about to send him back to Bedlam (Bethlehem Hospital, the insane asylum). He ducks behind a tree, peeps out, runs as fast as he can to another tree closer to the house, peeps out, runs to another tree, then over stile to Stage Center, cautiously tiptoeing to house. He peeps in at the open door. When he realizes that the clamor is not directed at him, he laughs in glee and indicates to the audience that a melee is going on inside. He closes the door (which shuts off the sound of the fight) and speaks to audience.]

DICCON. Many a mile have I walked, divers and sundry ways, and many a good man's house have I been at in my days; many a gossip's cup in my time have I tasted, and many a broach and spit have I both turned and basted – yet my eyes never saw within doors such a plight as here within this house appears to my sight. *[He runs to door and peeks in; runs back to audience. Each time the door is opened, the clamor is heard; when it is shut, there is silence.]* There is howling and growling, all cast in a dump, with screaming and crying, as though they had lost a trump. Sighing and sobbing, they weep and they wail; I wonder in my mind: what the devil they ail! *[Diccon's curiosity is obviously painful. It kills him to be left out of a secret. He runs to the house and looks in. What he sees strikes him as hilariously funny.]*

The old girl sits groaning, with “Alas!” and “Alack!” And Tyb wrings her hands, and wipes her tears with a sack. And poor Cocke, their boy, he’s driven to such fits – I fear the poor folks have all lost their wits. [*DICCON returns to the house and goes inside. The din grows louder; DICCON runs out; he is hiding something inside his coat.*] Ask them what they ail, or who brought them in this stay, they answer not at all but “Alack!” and “Wellaway!” When I saw I wasn’t helping, out of doors I hied me, and caught a slip of bacon – when I saw that none spied me! [*He thinks it’s all quite hilarious.*]

[*HODGE is heard whistling offstage. He enters carrying a stick.*]

HODGE. See how I’m dressed after dabbling in the dirt – she that set me to digging should provide a new shirt! Was never poor soul that such a life had – Gog’s bones – the old dame has dressed me too bad! [*He drops the stick. When he bends to pick it up, we hear a loud rip. He grabs the seat of his pants and straightens up.*] Gog’s soul! See how this stuff tears! I’d be better off as a keeper of bears! [*He pulls off a patch and it falls to the ground; he stoops to pick it up – and we hear another ripping sound. He feels a gaping hole in the seat of his trousers.*] By the Mass, here’s a gash – it’s shameful how it’s spread – if it tears one stitch further, a man may thrust in his head!

DICCON. By my father’s soul, Hodge, if I should now be sworn, I cannot choose but say your breeches are torn!

HODGE. Gog’s soul, man, two days have not fully ended since Gammer Gurton, I’m sure, these breeches mended – but I’m made such a drudge to trudge for every jane, I’d tear my clothes if they were stitched with heavy chain! [*He gives a jerk to a part of his clothing and another rip is heard.*]

DICCON. Hodge, let your breeches go, and tell me, clown, what devil causes Gammer Gurton and Tyb, her maid, to frown?

HODGE. Tush, man, that’s their daily look, no joke – they cower so over the coals, their eyes be bleared with smoke.

DICCON. Nay, by the Mass, I saw perfectly well, as I came hither, that Tyb and her dame had quarreled together – or else a greater matter knocked them off their feet –

HODGE. Bless the Lord, they’ve never been so sweet –

DICCON. [*Peeks indoors; there is no sound*] By Gog’s soul, there they sit as still as stones in the night, as though they had been struck by fairies, or by some evil sprite!

HODGE. [*More concerned with his own affairs than those of the household, he remembers a recent adventure in town*] Gog's heart! I knew I should have bet a crown I'd learn of some prank as soon as I went to town!

DICCON. How was that, Hodge? Really? What did you hear?

HODGE. Well – I *saw* such a wonder as I've not seen this seven year. Tom Tankard's cow, by Gog's bones! She ran up her sail and flinging around his half acre, and whisking her tail as though she were being chased by a swarm of bees, and had I not cried, "Whoa, cow!" she'd have leaped out of his leas.

DICCON. Why, Hodge, is all your trouble in Tom Tankard's cow's tail?

HODGE. Well, I've heard some say such omens do not fail. But can't you tell, Diccon, what my Gammer frowns at? Has someone stolen her ducks or hens, or injured Gib, her cat? I can't help but wonder what her problem is. I'll go in and see what matters are amiss. [*Exit.*]

DICCON. Then farewell, Hodge – for awhile – since you're in haste, and I will visit Hob Filcher's shop to see how his ale does taste. [*Exit.*]

[*HODGE enters from Gammer's house, followed by TYB, whose face and torn dress are terribly dirty.*]

HODGE. I'm afraid – by the Mass, I don't know what to do. I feel the need of blessing – how about you? Perhaps some wicked spirit haunts our house – indeed – I'd be a nobby to venture where I have no need!

TYB. I'm worse than mad, by the Mass, to be treated this way – I'm cursed, I'm blamed and beaten all hours of the day – lamed and hunger-starved, dressed up like a hag – having no patch to hide my back except this rotten rag! [*Pulls on her skirt – it rips noisily, like Hodge's pants.*]

HODGE. I say, Tyb – if you are Tyb [*moistens his sleeve and wipes some of the dirt off Tyb's face*] – mmm – hmmm, that's who. What kind of trouble is this between our dame and you?

TYB. Gog's bread, Hodge! Lucky for you you've been gone a while – it had been better for all of us to have been hence a mile. My Gammer is so out of sorts and frantic with her groans, that Cocke, our boy, and I, poor wench, have felt it in our bones!

HODGE. What is the matter – go on, Tyb – why does she rave on?

TYB. She is undone, she says. Alas! her joy in life is gone. If she receives no comfort, she is truly dead — she'll never put within her lips one inch of meat or bread.

HODGE. By our Lady, I'm not very glad to see her in this dump. I'll bet some money her stool collapsed and she has broke her rump!

TYB. Nay, if that were the worst, we would not greatly care for bursting of her huckle bone or breaking of her chair; but greater, greater, is her grief, as, Hodge, we all shall feel! [*She flaps one of the tatters on his breeches. It takes a while, but HODGE catches on.*]

HODGE. Gog's wounds, Tyb! My Gammer hasn't lost . . . [*great suspense; he can hardly bear to say it*] . . . her nee'le?

TYB. Her nee'le!

HODGE. Her nee'le?

TYB. Her nee'le! By Him that made me, it is true, Hodge, believe me.

HODGE. Gog's sacrament! I'd rather she'd lost the heart out of her belly! The devil — or else his wife — is surely responsible for this shame! Tell me, Tyb, how this tragedy came upon our dame!

TYB. My Gammer sat down on her stool and bade me reach your breeches, and by and by (a vengeance on it) before she'd taken two stitches to put a patch upon your seat, by chance aside she leers. And Gib, our cat, in the milk-pan she spied over head and ears. "Ah, cat! Out, thief!" she cried aloud, and threw the breeches down. Up went her staff, and out leaped Gib through the door into the town. And since that time the needle can't be found . . . anywhere.

HODGE. And so my breeches aren't sewed up — tomorrow what will I wear? Now a vengeance light on all of you who better should have kept it — the cat, the house, and Tyb, our maid, that better should have swept it! [*He hears GAMMER GURTON give a loud, heartbreaking groan*] Ah! — here she comes crawling! Come on! The devil will have his say! You've done a fair day's work, now what do you have to say? [*GAMMER GURTON appears in her doorway. She heaves a great sigh which threatens to shake the house down. COCKE follows her.*]

GAMMER. Alas, Hodge, alas! I may well curse and ban this day, that ever I saw it, with Gib in the milkpan. For these and ill luck together, as knoweth Cocke, my boy, have struck away my dear needle, and robbed me of my joy, my fair long straight needle, that was my only treasure. The first day of my sorrow this is — the end of my pleasure.

HODGE. [*The know-it-all*] You might've kept it when you had it – but fools will be fools still! You need not lose what's safe in your hands – but you will!

GAMMER. Go, hurry, Tyb, and run, you imp, to the very end of town; you carried the garbage in your lap – find where you poured it down, and as you saw me raking in the ashes – and nearly got burned – so in all the garbage heap see that you leave no straw unturned.

TYB. [*Runs to stile, stops on top.*] That I shall, Gammer, swift and true; and soon be here again!

GAMMER. Tyb, stoop and look down on the ground – and take some pain. [*Exit. COCKE sits on stile, where he remains motionless. HODGE berates Gammer.*]

HODGE. This is a pretty matter; now what is your excuse? By Gog's soul, I think you'd lose your bottom if it were loose! Your needle lost, it is a pity you should lack care and endless sorrow. Gog's death! how shall my breeches be sewed! Shall I go thus tomorrow? [*Shows the flapping tear in the seat of his breeches.*]

GAMMER. Oh, Hodge, Hodge! If I could find my needle, by Saint Ed, I would sew your breeches, I promise you, with a good double thread, and put a patch on either knee to last a month or twain. Now God and good Saint Sithe, I pray to send it home again.

HODGE. For what purpose are your hands and eyes but this your needle to keep? What devil had you else to do? You kept, I think, no sheep. I have to go and dig and delve, in water, mire and clay, wallowing and slopping in the dirt still from day to day. A hundred things I have to do so we won't miss a meal – and *four* of you sit idle at home and cannot keep a nee'le!

GAMMER. My nee'le! Alas, I lost it, Hodge, because I up and hasted to save the milk set out for you, which Gib, our cat, has wasted.

HODGE. The devil will burst both Gib and Tyb, with all the rest! [*Holding hands over the hole in his seat*] I always get the worst end, whoever gets the best! Where have you moved about since your needle was lost?

GAMMER. [*Eager to help him play detective*] Within the house – this door I've barely crossed –

HODGE. [*Importantly*] Set me a candle, let me look, I'll find the needle – so be it! Gog's heart, you're so foolish, I think, you don't know when you see it!

GAMMER. [*Calling into house*] Come hither, Cocke! [*COCKE hops off the stile and runs to Gammer and stands behind her, awaiting her orders. She does not see him and calls into house more loudly.*] What! Cocke, I say! [*COCKE taps her on the downstage shoulder. She and HODGE both jump – they had forgotten he was still with them.*]

COCKE. Yes, Gammer?

GAMMER. Run into the house and look behind the old brass pan – t h e y o u' l f i n d an old shoe – if you can – and within the shoe there's an inch of a white tallow candle – light it and bring it right back –

COCKE. Before you can say, "Lord Randall"! [*Runs into house. HODGE tries to follow, but GAMMER grabs him and pulls him back.*]

GAMMER. No, wait, Hodge, don't go in till you have a light.

HODGE. Hurry up, you lazy boy – are you going to take all night?

COCKE. [*From within the house*] I can't get the candle lighted – t h e' s a l m o s t fire –

HODGE. [*Breaking away from Gammer and running through door*] I'll bet a penny I' l w a k e him up, the lazy liar –

GAMMER. Don't beat him, Hodge, but help the boy to light the candle stump.

[*TY Benters singing nonchalantly.*]

GAMMER. How now, Tyb, quick! What did you find at the garbage dump?

TYB. I tossed and tumbled that garbage heap over and over again, and wi n n o w i t h r o u m p y fingers, as men would winnow grain. I looked for your needle inside and out and all around the ground – but all in vain – I've been no help – your needle is still not found.

GAMMER. My needle! We shall never meet! Goodbye, Goodbye for aye!

TYB. Not s o Gammer, i t m i g h t be found – [*TYB stops and looks at GAMMER, who waits expectantly, hopefully, thinking that Tyb remembers something.*] if we knew where it lay.

COCKE. [*Enters laughing*] Gog's cross, Gammer, if you want a l a u g h t i n here at the door, and see how Hodge lies tumbling and tossing all over the floor, raking there some fire to find among the ashes – d e a d w h y , t h i s n o t one spark as big as a pin's head! At last in a d r a d o r n e t w o s p a k s h e t h i n k s he spies – which were indeed naught else b u t G i b , our cat's, two eyes! "Puff!" went Hodge, thinking thereby to have fire without dou b t w i t h that Gib shut her eyes, and so the fire

went out! And by and by she opened them, even as they were before – with that the sparks appeared again, as they had done of yore. And even as Hodge blew the fire (as he did think), Gib, as she felt the blast, straightway began to wink; till Hodge a-swearing, as came best to his turn, the fire was sure bewitched, and therefore would not burn. At last Gib up the stairs, among the old posts and pins, and Hodge ran up after him, and battered both his shins . . . [*TYB has been listening with increasing enjoyment; she rises and moves closer to Cocke, fascinated with his laughter.*] Cursing and swearing oaths I'd never heard, I thought, that Gib would catch the house on fire if she were not soon caught! [*COCKE and TYB roll on the floor, laughing hysterically.*]

GAMMER. See, here is all the thought that the foolish urchin takes – and Tyb, I think, at his elbow almost as merry makes. This is all the sense you have when others cry and moan – [*Calling to the upstairs window of her house*] Come down, Hodge, where are you? – and let the cat alone!

HODGE. [*Poking his head through the upstairs window*] Gog's heart! Help and come up! Gib's caught her tail on fire and is likely to burn all, if she gets a little higher! Come down, you say? No – even if you call me a patch; the house will fall on your heads if the fire spreads to the thatch!

GAMMER. It's the cat's eyes, fool, that shine so in the dark.

HODGE. Has the cat, do you think, in every eye a spark?

GAMMER. No, but they shine as bright as fire, as every man can see.

HODGE. By the Mass, if all burns down, don't put the blame on me!

GAMMER. Come down and help look for our needle. [*TYB and COCKE begin trying to sneak away so they won't have to search.*] Oh, that it were found! Down, Tyb, on the knees, I say! Down, Cocke, search the ground! To God I make a vow, and also to good Saint Anne, a candle shall they have apiece, get it where I can, if I find my needle in one place or another.

HODGE. [*Entering*] Now a vengeance light on Gib, – and even on Gib's mother, and all the generation of cats both far and near! [*COCKE sees something in Hodge's hair, rises and looks at him closely.*] Look on the ground, you oaf, do you think the needle is here?

COCKE. By my troth, Gammer, I thought your needle I saw . . . [*Extracts a straw from Hodge's hair*] But when my fingers touched it, I felt it was a straw.

TYB. Look, Hodge, what's this! The needle, by the Mass! [*All run to her. HODGE picks up the object.*]

HODGE. Nay, you fool, it's nothing but a piece of grass! [*GAMMER herds the three young ones toward her house.*]

GAMMER. Our candle is at an end, let's call it off tonight and come another time when we have more light. [*All exit.*]

[*Enter DICCON over stile, singing. He appears to be a little tipsy.*]

DICCON. Back and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go cold;
But belly, God send thee good ale enough
Whether it be new or old.
I cannot eat but little meat.
My stomach is not good;
But sure I think that I can drink
With him that wears a hood.
Though I go bare, take ye no care,
I am nothing a-cold;
I stuff my skin so full within
Of jolly good ale and old.

[*He wobbles and nearly falls, but rights himself and continues singing with renewed vigor.*]

Back and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go cold;
But belly, God send thee good ale enough
Whether it be new or old.

[*He staggers and comes even closer to falling; but again he steadies himself. He resumes the song with gusto.*]

I love no roast but a nut brown toast
And a crab laid in the fire.
A little bread shall do me stead;
Much bread I not desire.
No frost nor snow, no wind, I trow,
Can hurt me if I wold;
I am so wrapped, and thoroughly lapped
Of jolly good ale and old.

[*He staggers and falls backward off stile. There is a moment of silence; then his hand appears above stile and we hear his voice, louder than ever. He slowly rises and reascends stile as he sings.*]

Back and side go bare, go bare,
 Both foot and hand go cold;
 But belly, God send thee good ale enough,
 Whether it be new or old.

[*He runs down stile and addresses audience.*] Well done, Gog's malt! Well sung and well played! [*To Chat's house*] Come on, Dame Chat, if you are a true maid, one fresh pot of ale let's see, to make an end against this cold weather my naked arms to defend! This beverage warms the soul! Now, wind, blow on the worst – and let us drink and swill until our bellies burst! – [*To audience.*] He would be a wise man by cunning could define which way my journey lies, or where Diccon could dine! But one good turn I have; be it night or day, south, east, north, west, I am never out of my way! [*HODGE enters from Gammer's house, eating a grimy hunk of brown bread.*]

HODGE. I am goodly rewarded, am I not, do you think? with this goodly dinner for all my sweat and stink! Neither butter, cheese, milk, onions, flesh nor fish, except this piece of barley bread – what a pleasant costly dish!

DICCON. Hail, fellow Hodge, I'll gladly share your meat, if you have any – but by your words I understand your dainties be not many.

HODGE. Dainties, Diccon? Gog's soul, see this piece of dry horse-bread? No other bite this livelong day, no crumb came in my head. My guts, they yawl-crawl, and all my belly rumbles – my insides cannot be still, each part over the other tumbles. By Gog's heart, I'm so vexed, and my belly's so sore, I wish one piece were at the spitalhouse and the other at the castle door!

DICCON. Why, Hodge, was there no one at home your dinner to set?

HODGE. Gog's bread, Diccon, I came too late – there was nothing to get! Gib – a foul fiend might on her light – licked the milkpan so clean, it was not so well washed for nine years – or nineteen. A pestilence light on all bad luck – I had thought in spite of all this a morsel of bacon behind the door at least I'd not miss; but when I sought to cut a slice as I wanted to do, Gog's soul, Diccon, Gib, our cat, had eat the bacon too! [*This is the bacon Diccon stole earlier; his expression tells us so.*]

DICCON. Bad luck, he says! Marry, swear it, Hodge: this day, the truth to tell, you rose on the wrong side, or else your prayers were not well. Your milk slobbered up – your bacon filched! That was such bad luck, Hodge!

HODGE. Nay, nay, there was a fouler fault – my Gammer gave me the dodge. [*Shows tear in the seat of his pants.*] Don't you see how I'm rent and torn – my heels, my knees, and my breech! I'd thought, as I sat by the fire, to get here and there a stitch – but there I was wrong indeed.

DICCON. Why, Hodge?

HODGE. Oh well, I dwell among such a tribe of fools, I'd be better off in hell. My Gammer, I'm ashamed to say, handed me a dirty deal.

DICCON. How so, Hodge?

HODGE. Has she not gone – believe me – and lost a nee'le?

DICCON. An eel, Hodge? Who fished of late? That was a dainty dish!

HODGE. Tush, tush, a nee'le, a nee'le, a nee'le, man. It's neither flesh nor fish; a little thing with a hole in the end, as bright as a silver tiller, small, long, sharp at the point, and straight as any pillar.

DICCON. I don't know what the devil you mean – you bring me more in doubt.

HODGE. Don't you know with what Tom Tailor's man puts thread in and out? A nee'le, a nee'le, a nee'le – my Gammer's nee'le is gone!

DICCON. Her needle, Hodge? Now I smell thee! What bad luck you've drawn – by the Mass, what a shameful loss for your poor breeches! [*He waves the torn flap in Hodge's seat.*]

HODGE. Gog's soul, man, I would give a crown if it had but three stitches.

DICCON. How was that, Hodge? What did you say you'd pay?

HODGE. I'd give a coin of gold – if I had one, that is to say.

DICCON. Can you keep a secret?

HODGE. Else I'd wish my tongue were out!

DICCON. Then do exactly as I say, and I will find it without doubt.

HODGE. [*Excitedly pantomiming.*] I'll run, I'll ride, I'll dig, I'll delve, I'll toil, I'll trudge, you'll see; I'll hold, I'll draw, I'll pull, I'll pinch, I'll kneel on my bare knee. I'll scrape, I'll scratch, I'll sift, I'll seek, I'll bow, I'll bend, I'll beat, I'll stoop, I'll stir, I'll bow, I'll kneel, I'll creep on hands and feet – I'll be your bondsman, Diccon, I swear by moon and sun! If I can't find something to stop this gap, I'm utterly undone. [*Exhausted, he slumps to a squatting position.*]

DICCON. Why, is there some special cause for all your sorrow?

HODGE. Kirstian Clack, Tom Simpson's maid, comes here tomorrow. I'm not able to say between us what may hap – she smiled at me

last Sunday when I took off my cap. [*He nearly dies of embarrassment at this announcement.*]

DICCON. Well, Hodge, I have a suggestion, but we must keep it mum; it might be held against us if from it evil should come. Will you swear to be no blab, Hodge?

HODGE. [*Whispering in awe*] I will Diccon.

DICCON. Then go to, lay your hand here; say after me as you shall hear me do. Have you no book?

HODGE. I – have a book !?!

DICCON. Then that must force us both upon my gown to lay your hand, and there to take your oath. [*He speaks the oath, and HODGE repeats after him*]

I, Hodge, breechless,
Swear to Diccon, richless,
By the cloth that I shall kiss
To keep his counsel nigh
And always shall I try
To work that which his pleasure is.

[*HODGE kisses the hem of Diccon's robe and gives him a slap on the seat. DICCON doesn't like to be hit; he jumps and gives Hodge a mean look as he exclaims:*] Now, Hodge! You must take heed, and do just as I bid, no matter how you fear it. This needle again to win there is no way therein but conjure up a spirit.

HODGE. What, the real devil? Diccon, I say!

DICCON. Yes, in good faith, that is the way – brought by a mystic charm . . .

HODGE. Soft, Diccon, be not too hasty, yet, by the Mass, for I begin to sweat! I'm afraid of some harm!

DICCON. [*Drawing a circle on the ground*] Come hither, then, and stir thee not one inch out of this circle plot, but stand as I teach you.

HODGE. [*Stands in circle*] And shall I be safe here from their claws?

DICCON. The master devil with his long paws in here cannot reach you. Now will I begin to cast the spell. [*He holds out his hands and begins mumbling an obviously fake incantation.*]

HODGE. I say, Diccon, wait! Hear me well! Speak softly or not at all!

DICCON. Are you afraid of all that's vile?

HODGE. But can't you wait a little while? [*Begins to dance around nervously*] I've got an urgent call!