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## **Family Plays**

# THE SHEEP THIEF

Christmas drama adapted by  
Ford Ainsworth  
From *The Second Shepherd's Play*



# THE SHEEP THIEF

**Drama. Adapted by Ford Ainsworth from *The Second Shepherd's Play*. Cast: 4m., 3w.** Part of the charm of *The Second Shepherd's Play*—the most famous of the medieval mystery plays—is the contrast of the comical and spiritual. Most of the play deals with the efforts of three shepherds to keep a thieving scoundrel named Mak from stealing their sheep (these are the shepherds to whom the angels and the Christmas star announced the birth of Jesus). In spite of their vigilance, Mak manages to steal a lamb. The scene in which Mak and his wife, Gil, try to pass the lamb off as their newborn baby is some of the best comedy ever written. The play ends with angels greeting baby Jesus in the manger. Ford Ainsworth is the author of *Persephone*, *The Bridge* and *Farewell to Galatea*. Ainsworth provides language which is easily understood by modern audiences of all ages. The verse is not the sing-song variety which makes many verse plays monotonous for the listener. This script presents the verse in paragraph form as an encouragement to actors and actresses to deliver the lines as realistic dialog rather than as poetry. Its ease of presentation—virtually a bare stage, rags and robes for most of the costumes—means that it can be performed in the chancel of a church, on the floor of a large room, on the lawn, or even on the bed of a large truck (the medieval players performed it on pageant wagons). The costumes and the few set pieces should have a timeless and placeless quality. The setting is supposedly a hillside in Palestine near Bethlehem, and the shepherds are those to whom the angels announced the birth of Jesus. Yet the dialog, characterizations and local color are typical of Yorkshire, the county in England where guildsmen in the town of Wakefield performed the play in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. *The Sheep Thief* was named according to the fact that it was the “second play about shepherds” in a cycle of plays). A superb contest play, an ideal Christmas play and a perfect piece to represent the development of English-language drama leading up to Shakespeare and the golden age of Elizabeth. This play is a natural on the same bill with *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. *The Sheep Thief* is recommended for presentation by all groups for all types of audiences. *Virtually bare stage with props. Costumes: mostly rags and robes. Approximate running time: 30 to 35 minutes. Code: SY4.*

## Family Plays

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The Sheep Thief

# The Sheep Thief

An Adaptation

by

FORD AINSWORTH

of

'The Second Shepherd's Play'

**Family Plays**

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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FORD AINSWORTH

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# THE SHEEP THIEF

## CAST

DAME SNAP, leader of a company of players

COLL, a shepherd

GIB, a shepherd

DAW, a servant to Gib

MAK, a thief

GIL, Mak's wife

A SHEEP

SNOW MAIDEN

AN ANGEL (may be male or female)

THE VIRGIN MARY

A MUSICIAN

A DANCER

Other members of the company, ad lib (additional Angels, Musicians, Dancers, Jugglers, Tumblers, etc., as desired)

PLACE: On a hillside

TIME: The Birth of Jesus



## ABOUT THE PLAY

“The Second Shepherd’s Play” is the most popular of the medieval miracle and mystery plays for modern audiences. The outrageous comedy of the shepherd scenes enforces and strengthens the beauty and serenity of the Manger episode. An amusing plot, interesting characters, and the historical importance of the play make it a choice theatre piece for all groups.

And its ease of presentation--virtually a bare stage, rags and robes for most of the costumes--means that it can be performed in the chancel of a church, on the floor of a large room, on the lawn, or even on the bed of a large truck (the medieval players performed it on pageant wagons).

Ford Ainsworth’s adaptation into modern verse provides language which is easily understood by modern audiences of all ages. The verse is not the “sing-song” variety which makes many verse plays monotonous for the listener. And this script presents the verse in paragraph form as an encouragement to actors and actresses to deliver the lines as realistic dialogue rather than as poetry.

The costumes and the few set pieces should have a timeless and placeless quality. The setting is supposedly a hillside in Palestine near Bethlehem, and the shepherds are those to whom the Angels announced the birth of Jesus. Yet the dialogue, characterizations, and local color are typical of Yorkshire, the county in England where guildsmen in the town of Wakefield performed the play in the fifteenth century (its name comes from the fact that it was the “second play about shepherds” in a cycle of plays).

The San Antonio Little Theatre, which presented Ainsworth’s THE SHEEP THIEF every Christmas for a number of years, “sought to recreate the open artificiality, the simplicity, and joyous spirit of a medieval production. Its players represent uninhibited trades guildsmen in festive mood, enjoying the merriment of an outdoor performance, donning odd bits of costume with no concern for authenticity, setting their stage and props as needs arise, providing their own sound effects, and singing traditional Nativity carols with disregard for their proper historical time.” (From the SALT program notes)

A superb contest play, an ideal Christmas play, and a perfect piece to represent the development of English-language drama leading up to Shakespeare and the Golden Age of Elizabeth (this play on the same bill with RALPH ROISTER DOISTER and GAMMER GURTON’S NEEDLE is a “natural”), THE SHEEP THIEF is recommended for presentation by all groups for all types of audiences.

# THE SHEEP THIEF

By Ford Ainsworth

*[The stage is divided into two scene areas, but the boundaries of the areas are not fixed and the action flows freely across area lines. The left downstage area is the "moor" area where the shepherds keep their flocks. The right upstage area contains a raised platform with a curtained area to represent Mak's house and, later on, the stable at Bethlehem. No realistic effects are necessary.]*

*As the play begins, the MUSICIAN is alone on stage playing a recorder. The melody is a merry one, suitable for a round dance. Other instruments pick up the melody off-stage and the company of actors pour onto the stage shouting, clapping and dancing to the music. If possible a tumbler does acrobatic flips and a juggler performs his art. ("I Saw Three Ships" is suitable music.)*

*The music ends and DAME SNAP sends the actors to their places. COLL and the SHEEP huddle together to sleep at center. GIB sleeps up left. SNOW-MAIDEN stands poised with her basket of snow at center above Coll. DANCERS, JUGGLER, and MUSICIAN take places down left and right to observe the show (they are "The Audience"). The remainder of the cast withdraw from sight.*

DAME SNAP. Enough! Let's end this celebration! Enough of that! Each take his station. *[The last actors scurry into place]* I'll speak one word of explanation and welcome. *[She comes forward]* Welcome, one and all! *[She attempts a graceful curtsy but slips and staggers. The MUSICIAN snickers. DAME SNAP glares and the snicker subsides]* Our play is brief, our means are small.

MUSICIAN. We had no cash to hire a hall! *[DAME SNAP glares again]*

DAME SNAP. *[With a nod at Musician]* We have no skill. *[The MUSICIAN makes a face. DAME SNAP takes a handful of snow from Snow Maiden's basket and sprinkles it scornfully]* No skill, no fine inventions to match the scope of our intentions. But pardon us and hear our story. Perhaps your hearts will feel the glory our simple art cannot convey—the miracle of Christmas Day! *[She beckons the Snow Maiden to begin]*

SNOW MAIDEN. *[Bowing to audience]* Gentle friends, behold the plight of shepherds on a winter night. *[She sprinkles Coll and Gib with snow]* The wind blows keen, the storm clouds hover! They've naught

but snow to use for cover against the chill of winter's breath that pierces like the chill of death. [*She bends over Coll, scattering snow on him*] Awake, poor lad! No time for dreaming. The night is cold and thieves are scheming to steal your sheep! [*The SHEEP bleats*]

COLL. [*Sitting up*] My bones are weary!

SNOW MAIDEN. For you, no fireside bright and cheery!

COLL. [*Rising*] No patch of thatch to shield my head.

SNOW MAIDEN. [*Sympathetic*] No heap of straw to make your bed.

COLL. [*Blowing on his cold hands*] My hands! So bitten, cold and numb! [*He shows them to sheep*] Which is finger? Which is thumb? [*The SHEEP bleats in sympathy*]

DAME SNAP. [*Interrupting*] This winter wind is harsh and rough, but ice and frost are not enough. The landlord, too! [*The AUDIENCE applauds*]

COLL. [*Trying to hush her*] Yes—

DAME SNAP. Well, don't neglect him! [*To Audience*] And may some plague from hell infect him! [*The AUDIENCE cheers*] I've known some landlords in my time!

COLL. [*Growing impatient*] And so have I.

DAME SNAP. And it's a crime the way they lie—

COLL. Dame Snap!

DAME SNAP. And cheat the honest peasants of their meat and bread—

COLL. [*Tapping her shoulder*] Dame Snap!

DAME SNAP. [*Stamping her foot*] I'll have my say!

COLL. You interfere and spoil the play! Don't stamp your foot and look so vexed. I promise you the landlord's next! [*He shows her script to prove it*]

DAME SNAP. [*Pleased*] Then one more word to blight and curse him. May he fall ill with none to nurse him! [*The AUDIENCE cheers*]

COLL. [*Resuming his character*] Though frost may pinch, we can endure it, for Spring is sure to come and cure it. The landlord! Now he's a constant ill! Though Spring may come, he pinches still. [*AUDI- ENCE agrees*]

DAME SNAP. Now that's more like it.

COLL. [*To Dame Snap*] Will that do? [*She nods approval*]

DANCER. The landlord's bad enough, it's true, but there's the politicians, too!

MUSICIAN. To office once a man's appointed, he deems himself the king's anointed. The world was made for him alone!

DANCER. With all its goods to be his own.

COLL. [*Trying to take control*] He will borrow your plow—

DAME SNAP. Oh, sure! He'll *say* borrow!

COLL. And swear to return it by noon time tomorrow. The plow that he "borrowed" the first of September is still in his barn on the last of December. And perish your bones if you try to reclaim it! In the name of the law—

DAME SNAP. Or whatever you name it!

COLL. He will swear out a warrant and have you arrested!

DANCER. Officially, justice in him is invested!

MUSICIAN. Official vows must not be contested!

COLL. Official plows must not be molested!

DAME SNAP. That plow was yours!

COLL. But now it's his'n.

DANCER. If you object, you're sent to prison where gentle jailers beat and bang you.

DAME SNAP. 'Twere kinder far to simply hang you!

COLL. [*Disgusted*] Enough of this! My piece is ended. *You* play the part! [*He hands Dame Snap the script and sits down angrily*]

DANCER. [*Taking script back to Coll*] Don't be offended, but when you speak of knave and thief who use the laws to cause our grief, we can't resist a word or two. At least the things we said were true.

COLL. Well, go ahead. [*DANCER returns to place. COLL consults script, nods to Snow Maiden*] It's your turn.

SNOW MAIDEN. [*Uncertainly*] Mine? [*He nods*] I can't! My wits have lost the line.

COLL. [*Consulting script*] Here lies—

SNOW MAIDEN. Oh, yes! [*She runs to Gib*] Here lies another, a friend of yours—misfortune's brother. [*She sprinkles him with snow*] The wintry winds bare trees are shaking; with weight of ice their boughs are breaking. [*She throws more snow*]

GIB. [*Sitting up*] Oh weather, weather! Bother weather! Your ice and snow won't break my tether! Hand and foot! I'm tied, completely bridled, hobbled, harnessed neatly! And why am I so bent and harried? Friends, I'll tell you plain: I'm married! Ah, young men, let me advise you. Sweet young maids may soon surprise you! [*He leads Snow Maiden forward and gazes at her tenderly*] You'll find behind those eyes [*SNOW MAIDEN simpers*] so blue!

SNOW MAIDEN. *[Striking him]* They're brown!

GIB. *[To Audience]* There lurks the temper of a shrew!

SNOW MAIDEN. You pig! *[She knocks him flat]*

GIB. *[To Audience]* And that's the least they'll do! *[DAME SNAP comes to console her as GIB advances to audience]* Once the wedding bell has rung, once the wedding song is sung, once the wedding vows are spoken, chains are forged and can't be broken! The wedding feast, mid flute and flower, serves up a sauce that turns life sour. *[The DANCER applauds but is squelched by a glare from DAME SNAP]* Now take my wife! *[He seizes the Snow Maiden's hand and drags her forward]* Will no one take her? The devil himself could never break her! *[She struggles to get away, pulling him to his knees]* She'd bring him to his knees, repentant, and hell would need a brand new tenant! *[She breaks free and slaps him, then bursts into tears]* This ice and snow seems mild drops raining after the storm of my wife's complaining! *[The SNOW MAIDEN howls. DAME SNAP runs to her. COLL rises]*

COLL. Halt this speech! You've set her crying!

DAME SNAP. *[Leading the Snow Maiden out]* Don't mind him, dear. We know his lying.

COLL. *[To Gib]* Why waste your breath to no avail? They won't believe your sorry tale. Go tell your troubles to your sheep. *[He resumes his seat]* Or hold your tongue and let me sleep.

GIB. Or hold my tongue! That's easy said. At home, I sit in silent dread, but here I'll speak, I'll crow, and I'll caw to suit myself. Have you seen Daw?

COLL. Your servant, Daw?

GIB. Some call him so. He serves so poorly, halt and slow, he scarcely moves nor hand or limb. It's nearer the truth that I serve him.

COLL. Poor lad! Across the pasture there I saw him limp, bowed down with care and misery. His coat was torn where he had fallen on a thorn.

SNOW MAIDEN. *[Running in left]* Here he comes! *[DAW limps in left, moaning, showered with snow. GIB goes to meet him]*

GIB. You tore your coat!

DAW. I need a new one!

GIB. Not one goat I'll spend on you. I'll bid you roam! You eat me out of house and home!

DAW. *[To Audience]* Oh, patches and rags! You see, my friends? Patches and rags to keep out the winds. *[He clutches his stomach]* My

stomach! It's empty as last year's nest. I'm reeling—I'm dizzy for want of rest. *[Thunder rolls]* My hunger keeps growling as on I blunder. I can't tell whether it's me, *[thunder rolls—he raises his eyes]* or the thunder! Oh storms without, and storms within, and patches and rags to cover my skin! My eyes grow dim! *[He moves toward Gib]* Oh, help me, master! *[He trips and falls at Gib's feet]*

GIB. *[Unmoved]* You're a walking curse; you're a sore disaster.

DAW. I'm fainting from fasting and failing faster. I've trudged all night with never a wink. Oh, sir, give me something to eat or drink!

GIB. *[Mocking]* To eat or drink?

DAW. Just a crust—a rind!

GIB. *[Tossing him an empty sack]* You're welcome to anything you can find.

DAW. *[Searching the sack]* There's nothing! I'm famished! I'm sore distressed!

GIB. You've eaten your share and you've wasted the rest! Like that pigeon for lunch! I basted and turned it and left it to you—and blast you, you burned it! *[Strikes him]* There's a lesson to learn, and it's time that you learned it: There is nothing to eat until you have earned it!

DAW. *[To Coll]* You see, kind sir, the thanks I get for aching bones and toil and sweat? My coat is torn. My feet are wet, but I'll get even with him yet! *[He turns to Gib defiantly]* You hear me, sir? I'll stand no more. *[GIB threatens him, but DAW flees out of his reach]* I'll not perform another chore! *[To Audience]* After the servant trots all day, herding sheep and loading hay, famished, weary home he comes to an empty plate and scattered crumbs! Here I stop! *[GIB lunges and strikes, but DAW ducks and assumes a rigid pose]* Let your wrath be shed! I'll not move a muscle until I'm fed!

GIB. *[Contemptuously]* It's likely then you'll stand all night. I'll spare no pity for your plight. No, sir! Not I! I care not a hoot. You can stand right there until you take root. But tell me first where you left my sheep. *[DAW has fallen asleep in his rigid pose]* Why, he's standing up but he's fast asleep! *[He crosses and shakes DAW, who only moans]* Do you hear me, Daw? *[Shakes him again]* Wake up! Wake up! *[DAW collapses at his feet but does not wake]* I never saw such a lazy pup! *[GIB bends down to shake him again]* The sheep! *[The SHEEP bleats]* The sheep!

DAW. *[Settling down to sleep]* In a patch of corn they're pastured safe til the light of morn.

GIB. *[Angrily]* They're pastured safe? With none to mind them? Where neither wolf nor thief can find them? Did you hear that, Coll? *[COLL snores]* Ho, Coll? *[No answer]* What's here? *[He goes to Coll]* He's sleeping too! But a nap costs dear! When shepherds snooze, the thief will take! I've got to keep them both awake! *[He shakes Daw]* Look lively, Daw! 'Twill soon be morning! *[He shakes Coll]* Remember, Coll, we've had fair warning to guard each lamb with careful zeal! Mak prowls tonight, our sheep to steal! *[At the sound of Mak's name, the SHEEP bleats in terror and COLL sits up quickly. DAW shudders]*

DAW. *[Terrified]* That sheep thief Mak?

GIB. That lying knave! We must keep watch, our flocks to save.

COLL. *[Heavily]* But eyelids droop, and sight grows thick.

GIB. *[Inspired]* A warbled tune might turn the trick! Wake up, my lads! Don't stand there dormant! We'll sing! To frighten thief and varmint!

DAW. *[Sleepily]* Then I'll take tenor.

COLL. And I'll take bass.

GIB. And I'll mark time to keep the pace. *[They stand together and the MUSICIAN crosses to them to give them their pitch. Then the MUSICIAN accompanies them as they sing, improvising the tune or using any lullaby]*

ALL. Twilight falls on the pastureland,

Gleaming! Gleaming!

Here protecting our sheep we stand—

Shepherds one, two, and three! *[They almost fall asleep]*

Sleepy heads on soft pillow sleep,

Dreaming! Dreaming!

Weary shepherds their vigil keep,

Faithful one, two, and three!

*[They fall fast asleep, leaning their heads on each other's shoulders]*

*[MAK prowls in. The SHEEP bleats in terror and hides. A game of hide and seek begins. MAK cannot locate the SHEEP, who keeps changing his hiding place but betraying himself with a frightened bleat so that he has to move to another place. The SHEPHERDS snore peacefully while the search goes on around them. At last MAK tires of the search, comes downstage, and falls on his knees]*

MAK. Oh, thou who made both star and moon, now hear my prayer and grant my boon! Set guiding stars to light your skies and lead me where this lambkin cries, "Baaa! Baaa! Baaa!" *[The SHEPHERDS wake, startled. COLL approaches Mak cautiously]*

COLL. Who's that, that pipes so poor a tune?

MAK. [*Not noticing him, still praying*] Night and morning—late and soon, “Wah! Wah! Wah!”

GIB. It's Mak!

DAW. [*Terrified*] Not Mak!

COLL. It is, for a fact! [*MAK crouches, hiding his face*]

DAW. [*Snatching up sack*] Now, Master, draw your purse strings fast. [*He thrusts sack in Gib's hands*] And hold your breath, 'til he's gone past—else he'll steal both while you're asleep!

COLL. I'd better go and count my sheep! [*He starts out left. MAK huddles low. GIB cautiously sneaks up behind him, trying to see his face*]

MAK. [*Turning suddenly*] What's here? [*GIB jumps back, tossing his sack in the air. MAK catches the sack and hides it behind him*] Good company, I see! [*He circles Gib, his back toward Daw*] If eyes speak truth, good shepherds three, and honest men, I hope!

DAW. [*Snatching the sack*] Let be! [*He tosses sack to Gib. MAK is surprised to see the sack*]

GIB. [*Threateningly*] What want you here?

MAK. [*Adopting a southern drawl*] My way I've lost upon this moor. The storm has tossed me to and fro and round about until my shoes are half worn out! And who are you?

COLL. [*Crossing to him*] You cannot tell? Why, Mak! I thought you knew me well! You've stolen sheep from me, some twenty, as well as pigs and hens aplenty. [*He pulls Mak's hat off*] How be you, Mak?

MAK. [*Snatching his hat back*] This Mak—you say he's stolen sheep from you?

GIB. I'll say!

MAK. [*Mock shock*] This thief goes free? [*They nod!*] Not apprehended? [*They shake their heads solemnly*] Heaven grant his ways may soon be mended!

COLL, GIB, and DAW. Amen!

GIB. [*Crossing to Mak*] Or else his evil days be ended!

COLL and DAW. [*Fervently*] Amen! [*GIB slaps Mak's back and knocks him to his knees*]

GIB. Amen!

MAK. [*Fearfully*] Amen!

DAW. [*Crossing to them*] By the hangman's rope may he be suspended!



GIB and COLL. Amen!

GIB and DAW. *[Prompting Mak]* Amen?

MAK. *[Weakly]* Amen! *[He crawls quickly to his feet]* A pox upon him! *[He whips off his hat and holds it out to receive a collection]* I've been sent by Yorkshire's lord to gather rent.

COLL. *[Scornfully]* Oh! You're a tax collector now!

MAK. That's true. I must survive somehow! So now your rent must be collected! *[He holds hat to Gib]*

GIB. *[Mocking]* You walk these moors all unprotected? I fear some clever thief may steal it!

MAK. *[Showing pouch]* I have this pouch where I conceal it! *[He crosses to offer his hat to Coll]* So have no fears, my lads, you bet it won't be stolen once I get it!

GIB. A likely bet! You can't abuse us! That southern accent won't confuse us. We know you, Mak!

MAK. *[Mystified]* You know me?

GIB. Well! Much better than I'd care to tell! Look close! *[MAK inspects them carefully and pretends sudden recognition]* Why Gib! Why Coll! Why Daw! Three finer lads I never saw. I must be going daft—or blind. I never hoped you three to find!

COLL. We never hoped to find you, either!

GIB. At least not living—still a breather.

COLL. The last I heard, you were sorely stricken, poisoned from eating stolen chicken!

MAK. *[Weeping]* You make harsh jokes, but misery stills my laughter. Would I had died and joined the sweet hereafter! You'd not believe the miseries of my life!

GIB. You're right. I'd not. But tell us, how's your wife?

MAK. *[Tearfully]* Poor wife! Poor Gil! She drinks a bit.

GIB. We know!

MAK. *[Exaggerated grief]* But who could blame her? Such a deal of woe! And eat! You never saw one eat like Gil! I swear she never seems to get her fill. And children, too! Within each twelvemonth span, she adds another howler to our clan—and some years two! No wonder she's a scold! More babies underfoot than lambs in fold! So many mouths! Starvation pinches sore. My stomach's not been filled this month—or more!

DAW. As sorry a tale as ever was sung or said!

GIB. A pack of lies!

COLL. Your thieving keeps them fed!

MAK. [*Shocked and hurt*] These words to me? [*They laugh*] You cut me to the quick! It's true I'm poor, worn-out, and well-nigh sick, but honest, too! [*He picks up Gib's sack and hides it behind him*] In villa, farm, and town, my honesty's well known!

DAW. Such wide renown!

COLL. [*Clapping his shoulder*] The honest fox of Yorkshire, so they tell, with just two feet, but thirty hands as well to pick the pocket, open bolts and locks. [*He snatches sack from Mak*] The whole shire knows you well, oh honest fox!

DAW. [*Sitting down, yawning*] Come fox or wolf, my eyelids droop and wag. With weariness my knees begin to sag.

GIB. We dare not blink our eyes in slumber deep and leave this honest fox to guard our sheep.

COLL. Let one keep watch.

DAW. Not I!

GIB. Nor I!

COLL. Then what's to do? This fox is very sly!

GIB. [*Inspired*] My wits, I think, have solved this riddle! Make Mak sleep, too—but in the middle! [*He shoves Mak down. They gather round him*] We'll sleep secure! No sheep he'll take. He cannot stir, but we'll awake! [*They lie down around Mak*]

DAW. Solution sweet! I doze already.

COLL. Now lay on hands! [*GIB holds one of Mak's arms. DAW the other, and COLL grabs his ankle*] And hold him steady! We'll guard the thief and save our stores!

GIB. And devil take the one who snores! [*They fall asleep quickly, snoring loudly. MAK makes an effort to free his arms, but the sleepers hold fast. Finally, he brings his wrists together and jerks them free. Without waking, GIB and DAW grab sleepily and grasp each other's wrists, tugging and grunting. MAK lifts Coll's hand from his ankle, but COLL grabs his knee unconsciously. MAK lifts Daw's ankle and transfers Coll's grip to it. The sleeping shepherds snort drowsily, pulling at each other. Then they settle into even deeper sleep. MAK stands in the middle*]

MAK. Softly now! And sleep you sound, snoring on the icy ground. Softly? Why? The banshee screaming would not rouse them from their dreaming! [*He casts a spell*] Weave a spell and make it stick! Sleep so sound and fog so thick dull the brain and cloud the eye! Let no wakeful

shepherd spy! [*He steps out of the circle*] There! Now beat them, call them, shake them! Under my spell, no art can wake them! [*The SHEEP bleats sadly. MAK runs to it, but it hides*] Why, how now! Here's a luckless lamb left with neither ewe nor ram near to comfort or console it. Could you blame me if I stole it? [*He coaxes the SHEEP out of hiding*] Lambkin, simple, sweet and pure, how can you this night endure? On this hillside left defenseless while these shepherds snore here senseless. [*The SHEEP bleats pitifully*] Awful thought! [*He weeps*] I cannot bear it! To think—some wolf might rend and tear it! [*The SHEEP bleats in terror*] Cruel men! They sore mistreat you! [*The SHEEP bleats agreement*] What was that? [*A sad bleat*] You mean they beat you? [*An affirmative bleat*] Starve you, too? [*An affirmative bleat*] Ere you grow thinner, come! [*The SHEEP holds back*] I'll take you home to dinner. [*The SHEEP agrees. MAK leads or carries lamb to the curtained platform*] Oh, Gil! Ho, Gil! This nip of winter chills my bones! [*GIL sticks her head out and glares at him*] Pray let me enter! [*GIL withdraws her head. MAK places his hat on the sheep's head*] Open the door! [*GIL draws the curtain*] Aha, my dear, you see? I've brought a friend to cheer you! [*Indicates lamb in the hat*]

GIL. [*Harshly*] Blight your friend! We need no boarder! What? Are your wits quite out of order? Away you go, you worthless bubble, leaving a house chock full of trouble, with nothing to eat and the chores to do! No helping hand do I get from you! Scoundrels, both! You pair of lazies! You and your friend go straight to blazes!

MAK. Speak soft! *This friend is sure to please you!* [*The SHEEP bleats. GIL turns and smiles benignly*]

GIL. Why, love! Come in! [*She fondles sheep*] I did but tease you!

MAK. Your words, my pet, were over hasty.

GIL. How plump he is! How sweet! [*SHEEP bleats happily*] And tasty. [*The SHEEP scurries away frightened. They capture him*]

MAK. And note the fleece! You ne'er saw thicker!

GIL. For that, they'll hang you all the quicker. They're bound to miss this little mutton. We'd better eat him now! [*The SHEEP bleats in terror and tries to hide under the crib*]

MAK. You glutton! There's no time now to spend in eating.

GIL. But if they come, they'll hear him bleating and then they'll hang you, quick as lightning!

MAK. I must admit that thought is frightening. [*He draws his knife*] Suppose we slaughter him and hide him! [*He approaches SHEEP, which bleats in terror and retreats*]

GIL. They'd search the house until they spied him! [*SHEEP hides behind her skirts*]

MAK. Then what's to do? While we stand talking, those shepherds may be up and walking, and if they miss both lamb and me, they'll follow fast!

GIL. [*Inspired*] Some light I see! Oh, what a brain I have! I thank it! [*She takes blanket from bed and wraps it around sheep*] The lamb I'll wrap in this old blanket! And in the cradle let him frolic! [*They put SHEEP in cradle. He bleats happily*]

MAK. If he should bleat?

GIL. I'll swear it's colic. [*Indicating sheep*] Your new-born son, Mak!

MAK. [*Delighted*] I adore him!

GIL. [*Petting sheep*] I'll swear to all, this night I bore him! I'll croon a lullaby and pet him! [*The SHEEP bleats happily*]

MAK. They dare not peep, or they'll upset him and start him howling if they wake him.

GIL. And when they're gone, I'll roast—or bake him! [*The SHEEP bleats in terror and ducks under the blanket*]

MAK. My clever Gil! I left them sleeping! Now, back among them I'll go creeping, that when they wake they'll find me snoozing!

GIL. [*Impatiently*] Then make some haste. Good time you're losing!

MAK. [*Patting sheep*] You'll mind our darling well?

GIL. Don't doubt it. Now back you go and quick about it! [*She closes the curtains. MAK sneaks cautiously back to his position among the shepherds. As he lies down, he gives Coll a pinch*]

COLL. [*Starting up shouting*] Oh! Saints preserve us!

GIB. [*Sitting up quickly*] Did you scream?

COLL. Some devil bit me in my dream!

DAW. [*Terrified*] A devil! Where? [*He hides behind Coll*]

GIB. [*Rising*] Oh, never mind him. He dreamed some devil slipped behind him and nipped him sore.

COLL. [*Rubbing his pinch*] He did! I swear! His teeth marks in my flesh I bear.

GIB. The devil, friend, may stew and baste you, but, mark my words, he'll never taste you.

DAW. [*Awe-stricken*] You saw the devil! Was he black?

COLL. Why no! I'd say he looked like Mak. [*They all look at Mak, who snores heavily*] I dreamed he sought our sheep to steal them. I felt his teeth! [*Rubs his pinch*] I still feel them!